LOOT OF THE FLYING DRAGON

KENNETH PAYSON KEMPTON

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LOOT OF THE FLYING DRAGON

By Kenneth Payson Kempton

PHANTOM GOLD
RED EAGLE ISLAND
SEAGOING JOCK
THE LUCK OF THE BLUE MACAW
THE BOYS' TRADER HORN

LOOT OF THE FLYING DRAGON

BY

KENNETH PAYSON KEMPTON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

WILFRED JONES

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TO

WILL BRADLEY

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TO THE READER:

THIS tale is partly true. John Rackham was widely and bitterly known in the West Indies of the early eighteenth century, and suffered the just fate of pirates by being hanged, on November 17, 1720. André Paul, Sieur de Benoit, lived (though not by that name) in the person of one Captain Misson, who at about the same time actually founded a free State dedicated to the highest principles and governed by articles almost as I have them here. Nicholas Hornigold may have been brother or cousin to that notorious Benjamin who was the terror of the Bahamas and Florida Plantations in 1716 — a relative, however, who cowardly preferred to commit his depredations behind the guise of an estimable reputation, and ashore. Captain Woodes Rogers, and the Act of Grace which George I sent him across the Atlantic to execute, are known to history.

All the other people and events in the story are fictitious.

K. P. K.

Newtonville, Massachusetts
June, 1929

LOOT OF THE FLYING DRAGON

CHAPTER I

OLD NICK MAKES READY FOR A GUEST

Mr. Nicholas Hornigold, the notable importer and general merchant of Boston Town, left his countinghouse at the usual hour, that evening. Though his face, long and heavily browed, looked pallid in the dusky light, his step was firm, his carriage erect; and as he nodded to acquaintances along the cobbled way he gave no sign of the caldron of hatred and terror that seethed within his breast.

Reaching his house on the northerly slope of Snow's Hill, he instructed the manservant who admitted him to set out an extra place at supper; then went up at once, according to his custom, to dress. In less than a half-hour glass thereafter

he had returned to the lower floor and seated himself before two candles at the massive writing cabinet in his study. Here, without pause or preamble, he set about the composition of three letters.

The first was addressed to " Capt. Jos. Bellamy, Brig *Fancy,* Scarlett's Wharf," and bore a message of but one sentence:

" The accompanying Bale of Goods must not be return'd."

Mr. Hornigold drew a breath through his thin white nose as he shook sand on the ink of the superscripture. " Or 'tis Execution Dock for the both of us," he added in a whisper.

The second letter was somewhat lengthier. "To. F." it ran:

Since parting, I have bethought me 'twas thy Negligence in leaving the Chest open that has wrought all this Discomfiture. Make one more such Error, Clodpoll, & thy Time hath come. H.

The third missive was longest of all, and its composition cost Mr. Hornigold much quill-chewing and knitting of his bushy black eyebrows. When at last indited to his satisfaction, it read as follows:

To Stephen Vane, Esq're,
Sudbury Street, hard by the Church Yard —
My Worthy Friend:

'Tis my Duty to hand you News of the gravest Import. For some weeks gone it has come to my Notice how that your Son, Master Barnaby's, Heart lay not in his Work but upon ungodly Notions of Outlawry & Adventuring. The matter was brought to a Head to-day by my Discovery of a Shortage in the Books of Account, & the boy being question'd did tearfully confess 'twas his Purpose to purloin the Sum & with it fare forth to seek his Fortune piratically upon the High Seas.

Whereupon I bade him sup with me to-night, for I am no such a one as to deem himself above Hospitality to an Apprentice, & I hoped to dissuade him friendlywise from his Unholy Design. Alas, 'tis late as I write this, & I have pled with the boy in vain. I return him to you, therefore, in the custody of my Servant, praying devoutly that his Parent may succeed where his Employer hath fail'd.

Rest assur'd, my Dear Friend, that on this misfortunate Affair my Lips shall be seal'd.

My Compliments to You & to Good Mistress Vane, from

Your ob't & sorrowful Servant,
Nicholas Hornigold.

Having read this last letter through, the merchant folded and sealed it with care and laid it beside the other two in a row on the top of his cabinet. He pondered the three lying so, and

suddenly his cadaverous frame began to quiver with silent chuckles. In a moment he was doubled over with a horrible mirth, from which there issued not a sound.

Abruptly reaching up behind his head, he pulled a bell-ribbon. When the servant entered, his master's features were composed, his manner stern. He picked up the first letter, that addressed to Captain Bellamy.

" As soon as the bos'n and his men arrive," says he, " give him this and station him as I directed. The signal is to be when I let fall my pipe. Make sure he understands."

" Aye, sir."

Mr. Hornigold took the second letter. " As soon as you have served supper, deliver this to David Fenn at his house. Say these words to him: ' Whatever befalls, silence.' "

" Aye, sir."

There was but the one letter left, and this last Mr. Hornigold weighed in his pale and bony hand. His voice fell low.

" Hark'ee! At midnight or thereabouts, run every step of the way to Cooper Vane's house. Knock loudly with much ado, rouse the household, then ask to speak to the cooper privily. Bid him read this letter in thy presence, and say this to him all short of breath: ' As we passed the waterfront — the lad — escaped my grasp. A

ship was weighing anchor — I fear the worst. I dared not arouse the watch, as my master commanded secrecy.' Now repeat this after me. 'As we passed' . . ."

The servant obeyed, his eyes of a whipped dog flickering.

Even as the last words of the repeated message sounded from his lips, the big house echoed to three loud raps on the knocker.

Hornigold looked up sharply. "Is supper served?"

"Aye, sir."

"Good!" He arose, smiling and at ease. "Show my guest in."

CHAPTER II

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

Two days previously, the brig *Fancy* had arrived in harbor from the West India Islands, and for some reason unknown to Barnaby Vane she had been unloaded and made ready for sea again in a mortal hurry. Upon this very afternoon the lad had been engaged in footing up her bills of lading. And 'twas a trifling error in reckoning those accounts that brought a mad world tumbling about young Barnaby's ears.

Outside the countinghouse window, westering sunshine fell warmly upon Scarlett's Wharf, the stout ship moored there, and the dull green of the bay. Within the countingroom a fly or two buzzed through the musty stillness. At his high stool perched Barny, his head nigh buried in those

dull documents, a quill on his ear, his tongue in his cheek, and his blue eyes very thoughtful.

And a biddable scamp he looked as he sat there. Long-legged he was, and upstanding, clothed in neatly patched homespun doublet and breeches, a clean shirt and yarn stockings. Freckles lay thick athwart his cocky nose. He could, if he would, wiggle his ears by alternately raising his scalp and scowling heavily — and this ingenious feat, off and on as he worked, he was performing now.

More the lad you would have looked to see scouring the woods for squirrels with his father's blunderbuss, or buccaneering his galley-raft round the Mill Pond, than conning salt-stained ship's papers in a fusty office.

He had ever been an indifferent hand at this poky business of figuring. When at last the job was done, he gathered up the pile of cockets and other papers on which he had been working, and handed them over with a huge sigh of relief to David Fenn, his fellow clerk, at Mr. Hornigold's inner office door. Somewhere in that inky sea of digits and ciphers, all unknowingly the lad had laid seven shillings on eight and called the sum *sixteen shillings*. . .

" Hi-ho-hum! " Barnaby returned to his stool with never a care in this world. For a space he trimmed his quills. With that done to his satis-

faction, he cocked his elbows on the desk, set his chin on his fists, and fell a-whistling.

His venturesome eye lingered on the tall spars and the bluff bow of the brig *Fancy,* and the brisk movements of men and cargo on the wharf beneath his window. "Three years," he mused aloud, "and this villainous 'prenticeship to Old Nick will be dead and done, Barny. And if ever again you bind yourself to man's beck and bidding, may they hang you in chains by the ferry yonder for a bloody pirate and a fool!"

No sooner had the words left his lips than they were, as it seemed, echoed by a hoarse voice on the wharf below. "Aye, marry, hanged in chains for a bloody pirate and a fool!"

Barny started, supposing himself overheard, and peered down from his window ledge. 'Twas two seamen who had paused to light their pipes and gossip. Far from overhearing him, he saw they were not even aware of his presence.

"So that's what they call a King's Act of Grace!" chuckled the one.

"Ah, mate, ye may say so. Here 'tis, set out fair and square in last week's *News-Letter* for all who runs to read. Hark now." He plucked a sheet of newsprint from his pocket, and throwing out his chest, began to mouth and puff the words as one who reads a weighty document.

"'And we do hereby promise and declare that

in case any of the said Pirates shall, on or before the fifth day of September in the year of our Lord 1718, surrender themselves, every such Pirate or Pirates shall have our gracious Pardon.' A-hem!"

"And if they bain't surrendered by then — ?"

"As I told ye . . . in chains! Why, every tall ship in three navies'll be after them. How runs it? — let's see now: 'And we do strictly charge all our Admirals, Captains and other officers at sea, and all our Governors and Commanders of any Forts, Castles, or Plantations, to seize and take' . . . m-m-m . . . 'and for every pirate Commander brought to Justice, two hundred pounds reward.'"

"Burn me lights," the other man struck in, "but there's a han'some piece o' money! Yet tell me this. Say here's a penitent rogue wants to give hisself up. Where's he have to go — all the way to London?"

"Nay, dumb-pate! To New Providence Island of the Carribees — why to his own rendezvous. For here's this Cap'n Woodes Rogers or somebody been commissioned gov'nor of the place and sailed last month with a squadron o' warships to set the island under military rule and dole out pardons or hangman's knots as the case may be. Why, I tell ye —"

But then and there this tempting talk was

rudely interrupted, as some petty officer, spying the two idlers, haled them loudly back to work.

Young Barnaby gazed reflectively after the retreating figures. Pirates were well known by hearsay to him — as to whom in the colonies of those stormy days were they not? Though for most part infesting Southern waters, lurking among the myriad cays and islands of the Carribbean whence they could leap and snatch at the Spanish plate-ships homing from the Main, those raffish sea wolves often cruised north in summer to prey on shipping off the settlements of Newfoundland and Massachusetts Bay.

They were the terror of the coast. The General Court of Massachusetts had legislated against them, making piracy punishable by death and trade with pirates a felony subject to heavy fine and imprisonment. But of what use are laws against the lawless? The only consequence of those brave enactments was to fill the hearts of the marauders with undying hatred for every Boston ship they caught.

In short, the days and deeds of Drake and Morgan, whispered with fearful relish in school and meetinghouse, were gone never to return. To plunder the popish galleys of Spain had then been a profession of honor and glory. Since the peace, piracy had become the cowardly trade of cutthroats and jailbirds.

But now, if you please, a gracious pardon! And if they refused it, to the captor of each — two hundred pounds!

A fabulous prize, a king's bounty! Barnaby Vane had hardly ever dealt with larger sums, even in figures. The most of actual coin he had ever in his whole life beheld had been a sovereign piece — and that had been tight in Old Nick's fingers. He had never possessed so much as a farthing of his own. His father had almost no real money; he conducted his cooperage, like most honest folks, with barter of skins and produce.

Two hundred pounds! By the mighty, the lad gasped, but 'twere almost worth the risk to — to —

But he had sense enough not to complete the wild thought. Instead, he contented himself with wishing Captain Rogers luck in his enterprise. By all reports New Providence was a mighty citadel, armed with stout forts and bristling batteries, well provisioned against siege, and manned by a horde of desperate free-booters. He misdoubted, as had wiser heads, that the house-cleaning of that notorious haven would prove simple; how many pirates would choose to take advantage of a pardon that held an honest life as perquisite in its velvet claws.

But good lack! he thought. What concern was all this of his?

On an impulse he ducked head and shoulders beneath the desk and brought up his fiddle and bow. Then he swung round on his stool till he faced the long, empty room, and impishly wiggling his ears at an imaginary audience, crooked a knee, tucked the instrument under his chin, and led off with a soft sweet flourish.

'Twas a recent catch Barny played on that fateful afternoon, an impudent ballad called " The Turnip-hoer " which some wag had brought over in the Bristol packet. Its jocular legend was aimed at the very monarch whose fist had lately signed the Act of Grace — George of Hanover, teutonic sovereign of Britain, who upon arriving in London had sworn (so rumor had it) he would have the historic greensward of St. James's Park ploughed up and sown to his favorite vegetable — the turnip! Barny knew every stave and every word of the doggerel, and as the tune grew upon him he first hummed to his fiddling, then in a low clear voice sang:

" O the grass grew green by the Palace yard —
(With a hey! And a ho! And a hey-nonny-O!)
And a dragoon says to the yeoman of the Guard —
(With a hey! ho! nonny!) "

The bow quickened on the strings, the bold song

loudened. In the next room had arisen the sound of an angry voice and the clatter of a chair on the floor. But the young musician was all oblivious. His hair fell over his eyes, his fingers flew, his body bobbed and swayed to the rhythm that one toe tapped out on the rung of his stool.

And then the door opened and a sinister presence darkened the threshold. A horny thumb and forefinger clapped tight upon the performer's ingenious ear. And a voice, hard and rasping as file on iron, bawled:

"Pilferer!"

Old Nick! thought Barny, as the song died on his lip and his fiddle gave a despairing wail. In a twinkling he was jerked to the floor and whirled about and marched, with his pinioned head bent painfully, into the inner room. There he faced his employer, whose long face was gray with rage.

"Turn out thy pockets!" Mr. Hornigold's bony finger rapped a bill of lading gripped in his other fist. "Where is that shilling, ingrate?"

At that, spots of color flamed in Barnaby's cheeks, and his sea-blue eyes snapped. A lad of spirit, you may believe. And his beloved fiddle mayhap lay bashed by its fall, and his magical ear, by the feel of it, well-nigh torn from its moorings!

"What is this nonsense, Mr. Hornigold?" he

protested stoutly. "I know naught of your shilling, sir."

"How now, miscreant!" Old Nick's voice cracked, and his beagle eyes bogged from their sockets. "Is it for this I have schooled thee? Look there!" He had snatched another paper off the table, was shaking both under Barny's nose. "Ha! The seventeenth item from the brig's after-hatch — ha! — 'Consigned to' — ha!" The man had a paper in each fist now; his eyes darted dizzily from the one to the other like bees drunk with their own honey. "'Sugar, nine casks at three and' — ha! — 'forty-four pound *seven*. Two casks loaf at five and' — ha! ha! — 'ten pound *eight*. Total, fifty-four pound *sixteen*.' Thief! Ungorge!"

Barnaby coolly regarded the man's twisted face. "Like as not I computed wrongly, sir," he admitted. "But as for stealing — "

"You defy me!" his employer gasped. "The stocks! The whipping post! I'll ferret this out of thee, an it takes — "

He had whirled away as he spoke, and the words were cut off by the slam of the door. The key screamed in the lock, and Barny found himself alone in Old Nick's room.

Alone? But then, where was Fenn?

Neither his anger at the unjust charge nor the plight he was in (for the lad knew full well 'twas

the constable his hot-headed employer had bolted off to summon) could take precedence over this new surprise. He stared round him like a body gone daft.

Fenn the clerk had passed from the outer room into this not an hour ago, whilst Barnaby had been engaged with that very bill of lading which had stirred up this tempest. He had passed his papers into Fenn's hands at the inner office door. 'Twixt then and now Barnaby would have sworn he had heard Fenn's voice here with Hornigold's, and upon his own forced entry he had shamedly looked to be berated in Fenn's presence. Both windows of Hornigold's sanctum were heavily barred, and the place had no door giving on the wharf, its only egress being into the counting-room, which in turn opened on the street.

Barnaby hated David Fenn, hated him with the honest fervor of a man of spirit for a boot-licking toady. Now where had that slyboots betook himself?

The boy laid ink-smutted finger to his nose, and his eyes, which had been round with bewilderment, now narrowed shrewdly. If one man had hid him hereabouts, or better yet escaped the place, why not two?

In truth there was little in the bare room to offer concealment. Under the great table? No. Along the shadowed shelves stuffed to bursting

with dusty manifests, old accounts, and documents? No. But —

The chest! That great oaken piece carved so elegantly, black with age, standing against the wall in yon darkest corner! Aye, that would hide two men. And its mighty padlock, which Barny had ever remembered as being clamped fast, now hung open on the staple!

The rogue! thought Barny, approaching the chest a-tiptoe. Fenn had doubtless purloined something on his own account, and thought by hiding to escape notice till the storm blew over. After him, then! Have the wretch out, and appease Old Nick by showing him a real culprit!

Chuckling, Barny had lifted the hasp with the nicest care, and now swung the heavy lid upward. But at what met his eye he goggled like an owl, and fell a-shaking so mightily, 'twas all he could do to prevent that lid from escaping his grasp and falling with a thump that would have betrayed him.

Old Nick's chest lacked bottom! Through the gaping hole that its four walls enclosed, what should he see but a flight of stairs running downward into some sort of secret apartment, faintly lighted, glowing strangely, silent as the grave!

Young Barny wiggled his ears.

He had grown cool and still as that magical chamber beneath him. For a bit he was of two

minds whether to push on or close the lid and hold his peace about this dark business. But through the silence, two small sounds floated up to him. He heard the licking of harbor wavelets against the floor, below there. And he heard a queer and tiny scratching.

That last, being unknown, determined him. Noiseless as a mouse he eased the lid back against the wall, swung a leg over, descended three steps, and hunkered down with his head between his knees to look.

"Egad! 'tis a popish church!" he gasped in panic.

The cross made him think so — a massy piece reared against the farther wall, golden and a-glimmer in the candlelight with a thousand jewels. But the cross was by no means the only treasure in that room.

Beneath it stood two crystal chalices and several broad platters of beaten gold, and from its base to the floor dropped a flowing altar cloth of blue velvet, brocaded heavily and fair crusted over with glittering stones.

The floor? There was no floor visible save a cranny here and there. Heaped everywhere and mounting in hills up the walls lay such a trove of costly goods as Barnaby and sober Boston Town had never dreamed existed this side of heaven. A whole corner was bales of satin, spill-

ing colors of the rainbow. Another held a tumbled pyre of gleaming elephants' teeth and jeweled small arms. Bulging bags, their stomachs creased by the pressure of coins within, and studded caskets and trunks with winking silver ornaments whispered of the priceless store they held. On the walls, wherever space served, chain bracelets of ruddy gold, necklaces alight with green-white fires, and loops of chased beads hung as thick and negligent as rusty hoops in his father's cooperage.

And in the midst, buried to his waist yet unmindful of this king's ransom that was like to smother him, Fenn hunched over a small desk with his back to the steps, and by the light of his lone candle wrote busily in a shabby ledger.

Monstrous! Unbelievable! But Barny had no time to ponder the dazzling spectacle. He had not gaped and gasped for a dozen breaths before a new sound, above him and mortally terrifying, sent his legs scuttling upward and the dumb-struck pate of him bobbing out of the chest into the gloomy shadows of Old Nick's room.

Too late! He was astride the chest, one arm clutching for the lid, when the rush of footsteps through the countingroom ceased, the key screamed again, and the door swung inward with a crash. Mr. Hornigold stood transfixed on the threshold.

Poor Barny! His stout spirit quailed at this new extremity. Had he been seen coming out of the chest?

The thought was slain by a shock of amazement beside which the lad's emotions at all the strange matters preceding were as naught. For his master, after a choking gasp and one long moment of glowering silence, turned his back! — aye, spun about to face the countingroom!

" Constable," says he in a low, trembling voice, " I — I do believe we've been in error here." He passed out of sight into the countingroom, talking faster and faster. "Ha! I see it all clear now, and there was no injury done, but all a pother over nothing. Ha! a gross injustice — my own mistake. Thank 'ee, thank 'ee, Constable, and good day to you, sir."

Along with this feverish outburst and a good-natured rumble of pleasantries from the unseen officer, the outer door closed and a heavy silence fell.

Gathering his wits as best he could, Barny moved over to the table. His knees knocked together. For what could this procedure signify but some manner of punishment too fiendish brutal for sanction by the law?

And now befell the last and most astounding event of that astounding afternoon. The lank figure of Old Nick reappeared on the threshold,

and upon its pale features was fixed a slavering smile!

"My son," quoth the man, all humble and tallowy. "I see I have misjudged thee. Forget my hasty words. Overanxiety for certain cargoes delayed distraught me. 'Tis late; pack off to thy mother. And look you! To make amends for this unpleasantness, do me the favor to sup with me to-night. There are certain arrangements bearing on thy future that I — but of that, more later. Aye, and bring thy fiddle, lad. We'll banish care and for once make merry. Come, now, is it a bargain?"

Barny walked out of that room as in a swoon. At the outer door Old Nick detained him.

"Ssst! — one word more," says he in a whisper, and over his distorted face there spread a look of unspeakable cunning as one eyelid drooped, slowly winking. "Not a syllable of this — to nobody!"

So the boy had stumbled home, half dazed, and announced that he was to sup with his employer, the great Mr. Hornigold. His parents had hailed the news with innocent glee. His father ventured the assumption that he was to be taken into the firm. His mother, too, predicted a great future for him as she hurriedly darned a hole in his stocking and spruced him up with eager hands. To the door she bustled that bemused and staring

son of hers, laughing gaily at his moonstruck countenance and promising to wait up for him.

"Away with you!" In a sudden rush of tenderness, she had bent and swiftly kissed him. "Up with thy head, man! Look the world in the eyes! Come back to me a merchant prince!"

CHAPTER III

A BALE OF GOODS FOR THE *FANCY* BRIG

Barnaby had not long to wait after knocking at Old Nick's door. He was right glad of this, for the great shuttered mansion had looked so gloomy and forbidding that at the littlest opportunity he was ready to forget his master's strange invitation and take to his heels.

But no: the door swung inward, and he was ushered into a long dark hall. Seemingly he was expected, for after closing and bolting the door, the tall manservant who had admitted him conducted him without a word down a dim-lit corridor.

Then another door had opened, and he found himself at the threshold of a magnificent and

brightly lighted chamber and confronted by his host, who advanced upon him, smiling unctuously.

"Ha! A pleasure and an honor. Allow me" — Old Nick relieved him of his fiddle. "Sit here, prithee. We are just now served."

"The h-honor is mine, sir," stammered the young jackanapes, caught a-back by all this splendor.

Candles in sconces made the place light as noonday. Heavy arras of crimson velvet were close drawn over what should be window bays at either end of the room. In the center a table, spread with gleaming damask and silver service fit for a duke, was further illuminated by four tall candelabra near its corners. Two places were laid, and to one of the huge carved chairs Old Nick, resplendent in a black velvet coat rich with lace, satin doublet and breeches, silver stockings and a periwig, was bowing him, whilst into the other he was himself sinking with the eager sigh of a gourmet.

"Wine? Ha, no! Good lad. But for myself" — Mr. Hornigold filled his glass — "you will pardon. Come, try these oysters; they are baked with leeks and sage in a recipe brought to me from abroad. And the pigeons, shot yesterday in the Nonantum marshes — or would you prefer the venison? I can recommend it. Both

— of course, both. 'Tis only simple fare, but we'll make it up in quantity, eh? Ha, ha!"

Now Barney was not the lad to let doubts and suspicionings interfere with the enjoyment of hearty provender. He was always hungry. Here lay noble food. For an instant, upon entering that glittering room, his strange experiences this day and a sense of something wrong here had clouded his clear blue eyes and knit his brows. Only for the instant. His fears were lulled, his spirits rose. He fell to, hardly hearing Old Nick's smooth flow of conversation, and ate till he could eat no more.

"A little more pudding? Or the fruit? No, I see — ha, ha! Well" — Mr. Hornigold's thin pale hands again refilled his glass, then took up a long, curving clay pipe and commenced delicately to charge it.

As Barnaby watched, half asleep with all the warm food and the dazzling lights, he started up suddenly, and all his doubts came rushing back upon him. It seemed to him that there had been a sound, somewhere just outside the room, as of a latch softly closing. They two had been alone since the servant had shown him in. He could have sworn that little sound came from the windows. . . . He threw an anxious look over his shoulder.

Old Nick caught the glance, frowned slightly,

and then burst into careless laughter. "The wind rattling my casements," quoth he. "I get all the gale there is, here upon this hill. Egad!" — the frown returning — "'twill be a parlous night at sea." And as a fact, the buffetings of wind against the house could be plainly felt as they sat there. "I wish," Old Nick sighed ruefully, "I wish all my vessels were in port to-night."

That recalled to Barnaby his business here. He sat up straight. "You said, sir," he began respectfully, "that there were matters touching upon — my future — "

"Of course. Ha! There's an eye for commerce. Presently, presently. I make it a rule never to consider business till an hour after eating. First, you shall play for me. Stand over yonder by those hangings where ye'll have bow room and I can get a good sight of you. Farther — there! Now with the candlelight on either side, my lad, you make a picture."

Nothing loth, Barnaby stood as bidden, whipped up his bow, and commenced to play. His heart loved catchy rhythms as it loved little else on earth, and in fiddling he showed the fact. Forgetting all about him, presently he hummed to his tunes, beating time with a toe on the floor.

So he played and sang for an hour or more. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Old Nick's

head nodding, his pipe, that had long since gone out, held in slack fingers drooped over the chair arm, his half-emptied glass in the other hand. But he played on, unmindful.

Until, into the midst of a pretty jig of brooks and smiling meadows, there intruded the sound of a tinkling crash. Barnaby stopped short and looked up to see Mr. Hornigold's clay pipe in a dozen fragments on the floor.

At the very same instant, pitch blackness descended upon him, as fold upon fold of choking cloth enwrapped his body. He cried out, struggling stoutly against this horror. He felt his bow snap in twain. Hugging the fiddle to him, he pushed its bridge over flat on the sounding board and with both arms sought, even in this dire extremity, to protect the beloved instrument from harm. In a trice he was helpless. Tipped over on the floor, fiddle and all, he was rolled inextricably deep into the masses of heavy velvet. He felt rope trussed about the exterior and drawn taut till he could not move a muscle.

Gasping, bewildered, furious at the foul treachery served him, he must perforce submit and lie still. Common sense bade him save his breath; he would soon need it in that choking bundle. Breathing lightly, he listened.

Low voices penetrated his prison. Then he felt himself lifted, swung upward to sturdy

shoulders like a bale of goods, and borne out of that room and down the passage.

As the bolts of the great house door squeaked, Barny heard Mr. Hornigold utter a parting injunction. It was low-pitched, hissing, imperative.

" Take the unfrequented streets, Bos'n. If any man questions, tell him 'tis a last forgotten parcel of mighty importance for which the ship is waiting, and press on."

And the voice that Barny Vane would never forget trailed off in a soft, triumphant chuckle.

CHAPTER IV

CALICO JACK MAKES HIS BOW

A SHORT sennight later, and Barnaby was to be found fiddling blithely upon the *Fancy's* forecastle head.

In this wise had it happened. Half smothered by Old Nick's velvet arras, he had been borne to the water front, dumped on deck, cut free, and summarily kicked below by a captain thrown into a panicky rage by the brief epistle which the bos'n had handed him along with that bale of human cargo.

"'Must not be returned!'" Joe Bellamy had roared. "Od's life! So I be a slave ship, eh? And is't not enough that poor Joe burn the candle at both ends, one month afeared of havin' his throat slit or walkin' the plank, and the next

a-dodgin' of the king's tall ships with their yard-arms waitin'? *Take that, ye bale of goods!* Be off for-rd, and stay out o' my sight if ye would keep your skull whole! — Cast loose, there! Up courses! Ho, the longboat! Bend on them oars and warp us out o' this sink of iniquity!"

In truth, those first days had been sorry ones. Barny was sickened by the foul smells of the 'tween-deck quarters and the long sea roll. His body was sore from rough handling, his spirit sore at the thought of the treachery wrought upon him. Too, he was bitter cold. For the brig's mate — one Matt Rowse, a sawed-off stump of brutality with the voice of a trumpet, small shifty eyes, pursed lips, and a fist like a maul — had caught him and set him on the watch bill to earn the food the sight of which turned his poor belly end for end.

Dancing on the footropes, grappling wet and heavy canvas as the biting November wind moaned through the rigging, then did the lad's teeth clatter and his lips crack, and the shivering of his poor bones bid fair to send him crashing to the deck or overboard into the icy sea.

But the brig was footing southward. Soon the mellow sun of gentler latitudes warmed him and gave him courage. Already he could tail on to tacks and haul away with the best of them, could reef, could stand his trick at her bucking

wheel. His fiddle was safe (and with its spliced bow none the worse for its misadventure) in the custody of the cook, Black Robin, a mulatto from the Barbados with a blue tooth in his wide homely grin. Even salt beef and cabbage could be downed without a quiver; aye, and the lad's trencher passed back for more!

So he chirked up and looked about him. One night, instead of ducking below the moment he was relieved, he fetched his fiddle to the broad forehatch where the off watch lay idling, and struck up a tune.

"Hi, blow me! — Jack, Biddy, hark now!"

They came crowding about the musician. Cheers went up; here and there dancing started. In three breaths, from being the licked swabber of that vessel, young Barny was become a cherished favorite.

Rowse suffered him in silence. Captain Bellamy kicked him no more, but followed his movements with anxious, brooding eyes. But the foremast hands adored him. They called for more and more; and when the lad grinned and wiggled his ears for them, they shouted with laughter and clapped him upon the back, vowing him a bully blade and merry company.

Running before a brisk northwesterly and with watchful lead tracing the fifteen-fathom line of comfortable offing, the *Fancy* had meanwhile

doubled the dreaded Hatteras Cape, picked up the warm and friendly trades, and under lower canvas was loping steadily across the Gulf of Florida on a course that would bring her — unless Joe Bellamy had missed his reckoning — dead for the Bahamas and Northeast Providence Channel.

Four bells of the evening watch, and a fine night thick with stars but dark upon the sea. Blocks creaked and reef points slatted gently, and the old brig gave herself to the long easy swell with a rhythmic dip and a chuckle of water beneath her bows. Along the windward side of his high poop Bellamy paced, a restless shadow, his fists clasped under his coat tails and a spyglass hugged under one arm. Strains of a fiddle and gruff voices humming a jig rose from her forecastle head, to drift sleepily out across the unseen waters into soft fathomless night.

Of a sudden the humming ceased, and with it the fiddle, as Barnaby felt something untoward in the air. Cocklyn and Boyd had stepped over to the bulwarks; others looked up and fell a-whispering.

"What is it?" says Barny. Then, craning his neck, he saw.

Afar off on the skyline to eastward lay a ruddy glow. It gained strength as they watched, lighting up a broad circle of sea and turning blood

red the billows of black smoke like storm clouds that hung above it and poured away to the south. At its heart they now and then glimpsed tiny tongues of flame.

"There's no land there," the lad marveled. "'Tis a ship afire. Will we not go to her rescue?"

"Rescue!" A man had turned on him with a grim look. "Will a fat porpoise go rescue another out of the shark's jaws? She's past help, matey. Look aft there — old Bellamy's clapped eye to her."

Indeed, the captain had hoisted himself into the weather shrouds, where he clung with glass leveled, a black lump of attention. Even as Barny's eye found him, the old seaman dropped to the deck and his voice rang out hoarsely.

"A-all hands! Back the main yard! Stand by to come about! Rowse, shake out them tops'ls and 'gallants! Sharp now for your lives! — Let's git out of here!"

Never were orders executed more willingly. With a great to-do of rapping canvas and men heaving on deck and scampering aloft, the brig's helm was put down and she wore and paid off on the other tack. Quickly gathering headway as her upper sails caught the breeze, she forged through the water with new life and energy. As her course was changed, that strange menacing

glow to eastward had swung slowly astern till it hung dead over her taffrail. And there, through distance or for some other cause, before daylight it went out.

Next day, nevertheless, the lookout descried a sail astern. To Barnaby this was nothing remarkable. But at the hail Bellamy started, paling, and climbed with his glass to her main truck, and when he came down his brows were knotted and his face a greenish color, as if he had become seasick aloft there.

No yarn-spinning or merriment that day! The sun shone lustily out of cloudless skies, the sea danced and sparkled under the light pressure of the lazy breeze. The *Fancy* made a noble picture, scudding toward the invisible coast line, every inch of canvas drawing and a sizable bone in her teeth. Yet along her decks no admiring looks were flung aloft; no jigs were stepped; no songs bravely roared. Men walked stiffly, or stood in groups a-whispering and casting black glances astern.

All day the object of their anxiety gained in size and clearness. By noon she was a full-rigged ship flying no jack, pennant, or ensign. At six bells you could see her gun ports. And as the sun hung, bloody and low over the *Fancy's* jib boom, a puff of white sprang off the pursuer's bow, a dull boom broke upon the air, and a round

shot came skimming the seas to plump with a hissing splash hard by the brig's fleeing stern.

Bellamy had piped to quarters, served out muskets, and hauled the tarpaulins off his rusty twelve-pounders. But there was no heart in the man. He was low with cargo, undermanned, his armament nothing to make a poor Guineaman tremble. That tall ship yonder bristled with metal, its rails were black with heads. Bellamy chewed his lip, standing at his weather rail with the flag halyards in his own trembling hands. And when that shot splashed and he saw that escape before nightfall was impossible, the red and white crossjack of England came down from the brig's truck on the run.

So Bellamy hove the *Fancy* to, waiting with a heavy heart for what should come.

This was not long in occurring. The stranger swooped down upon him and spilled her wind half a cable's length away. A boat was lowered and speedily manned. As it pulled away, the level sunlight pricked out gaudy spots of color among the rowers and the glint of rich raiment in her stern. The boat neared, and the *Fancy's* high bulwarks hid her from those anxious, waiting eyes.

" I'll not lower rope nor ladder," Bellamy muttered through his clacking teeth. "Let the rogue board me as he can."

Nothing loth apparently, sundry bumpings and low laughter could be heard under the brig's flank amidships. No word or hail. Everything below there was being done coolly and with the calculation, as it were, of long practice.

Along the brig's decks there was a dreadful silence. Men stood frozen into awkward postures, arms grounded, eyes downcast, heads bent as if listening. Bellamy hunched like a stormbound crow at the break of the poop, his chin on his chest and his arms spread, gripping the rail. Up forward, Black Robin cowered on his knees under the forecastle gangway, a blur of brown and a gleam of rolled eyes, praying incessantly in a weird low whine.

Till of a sudden, every eye turned to one spot at her bulwarks, amidships.

A flowing black plume had appeared there, and a cocked hat a-top a lean and saturnine, mustachioed face. These rose higher to reveal a rich scarlet cloak flung back from jacket and petticoat breeches of a dirty calico. The man was barefoot. A brace of pistols protruded from his sash, and a jeweled rapier swung at his thigh.

He swept off his hat and bowed low in mock gallantry.

" Jack Rackham," says he mincingly and with an evil leer, " at your service, gentle masters! "

CHAPTER V

BARNY FIDDLES FOR HIGH STAKES

At that instant some nervous wretch let off his musket. Not at the intruder, clearly, for the ball ripped a gash in the mainsail bellying overhead; but the effect on him who called himself Rackham was as if he had been struck.

A black scowl replaced the leer on his face. Setting a little silver whistle to his lips he blew a shrill blast, then whipped out a pistol and fired point-blank at the offender — it proved later to be poor Cocklyn — who staggered back against the rail, clutching his shoulder.

The brig's bulwark was instantly alive with leaping figures. Men bare-backed and bare-legged, some bearded on face and chest, some with earrings dangling, some with gay kerchiefs

knotted about their heads, some clothed in rags and tags of lordly raiment; but all brandishing dirks or pikes or cutlasses — these poured across the rail in a bright roaring stream and overran the *Fancy* from knightheads to binnacle. The air rang with their savage cries, with the clashing of muskets hastily thrown down, and with the scuffing of feet as the captured seamen were herded like so many sheep into a solid mass on the main hatch. Their captors surrounded them, grinning, threatening the slightest move.

Rackham had not stirred from his perch. "No mischief now," he snarled, "or I'll cut your lousy hearts out! Quartermaster, go the rounds and see who's with us. I want ten men or as many more's will sign. Whoever refuses . . ." With a sinister look he left the sentence unfinished, and beckoning Bellamy, who had not left his post at the barricade, leaped to deck and at a lithe swagger disappeared aft into the cabin.

At his words a bandy-legged ruffian with a long white scar athwart his cheek, who had taken no part in the herding but slouched against the pin-rail chewing a tobacco leaf — now this one moved briskly toward the crowded hatch. Selecting a man on the outside, he gripped him by the arm and commenced his persuasion with the oddest mixture of threats and wheedling in the world.

Now young Barnaby, pressed into the midst of

that parcel of desperate mariners on the hatch, listened with heavy heart to those about him debating their extremity and trying to decide.

"'Tis rich pay," one mutters, "and plenty rum."

"Aye, and Execution Dock at the end of the v'y'ge," growls another.

"Every lad his own master. A lazy life. No bleedin' mate with a belayin' pin drivin' ye hither and yon."

"But a hanger into yer ribs if ye close yer eyes, or a marooner's death should his nibs tire of ye."

"Nay, but what if we won't go? There's the nub of it."

"Ah, the plank mebbe. Or sewed up in her mainsail and hove to the sharks. What's the good o' delay, I says. Laugh in the devil's face and go now like honest men, I says."

What to do? Out yonder the quartermaster was working fast. Pulling the men out singly, he put his questions and sorted them into two groups, those who'd go with a hearty clap on the back to one side, those who refused with a kick and a curse to the other.

"But how could the king's ships hang us if we join to save our lives?" Barnaby asked his neighbor.

"'Tis the law, boy. An ye join willingly, a pirate you be. Certes, should they use force now,

that might be another matter. But how prove it?"

At this moment, recollection of that Act of Grace which the two seamen on Scarlett's Wharf had been gossiping of, fell into Barny's head.

"But — but the king's pardon!" he cried. "Heard you not — ?"

His neighbor laughed bitterly. "That witch's tale! Why, 'tis no more than a ruse to get clutches on 'em. Their pardon is granted — whilst they dances on empty air!"

Before Barny could ponder the problem further, he felt an iron grip on his arm and looked up to find the quartermaster, bull-necked, red-faced but for that ugly scar, glowering down upon him.

"Split me! A he-whelp!" the fellow roared. "What say you, pretty bib? What are ye, cook's boy, supercargo, passenger — or what?"

"I have naught — " began Barnaby, meaning to make his presence here clear; but a man broke in:

"Sir, ye should hear him play the fiddle!" came the eager whisper of somebody anxious to gain favor and mayhap save his own skin.

"The fiddle is it? Od's wounds! the bloody ship's got musicians! What style! The cap'n will wish to hear of this. Where is this fiddle? Produce it and leave us have a taste of thy skill."

Black Robin scuttled off to bring the instrument. Whilst he was gone, the quartermaster continued with those few left on the hatch, and when the mulatto returned Barnaby stood alone. He took the fiddle in his hands, white-faced and sullen.

"I be but a poor hand at it," he muttered.

"Belay there! We'll judge o' that. Strike up now!" And the quartermaster encouraged him with the nozzle of a pistol in his ribs.

Willy-nilly then, Barny tuned up and made ready to play.

Never was stranger scene of music. The sun, crimson and low on the sea's rim, cast a lurid glare over the ship's deck and the crowd of men standing about — the prisoners pinch-lipped and despondent, the buccaneers nudging one another and chuckling in anticipation. Barnaby raised his bow.

But it never touched string. The lad stiffened, his arm halted in mid-air. And every man jack stood stock still, a-listening intently.

For a mortal cry of agony, long-drawn and squealing, was dying away on the hushed air. It had issued from her stern. In the silence that followed it, all eyes fixed on the cabin door.

And through it came Rackham, a smile on his dark face, delicately wiping his rapier on the scarlet cloak, which showed no stain.

"An a gentleman offers to board you when you're crossing the Styx," he flung pantingly over his shoulder, "methinks ye'll do him the favor of a ladder!"

Then he came on swiftly, snapping his blade into sheath and taking account of this unusual proceeding. "How now, Gabe Shattock!" he addressed the quartermaster with a haughty scowl. "What means this foolery? Is this any time for dalliance?"

Scar-face bent cringing. "The division was made, Cap'n," he whined. "This here lad being the last, and some said he could play the fiddle, and thinks I ye'd wish to know whether or no, in case —"

"Enough!" He turned upon Barnaby. "Canst play, boy?"

Barnaby stared into those cold black eyes, and held his peace.

"Dumb-struck! Speak up, men! Can he?"

"Aye, can he! Try him, Cap'n!" piped several of the brig's crew.

Rackham grunted. "That's well. A fiddler bowing on the poop to hearten us for boarding, eh? Teach had one, and Auger. What say you, lad? I'll berth ye in my cabin and feed ye at my own table. Half a share ye'll get, and a bonus every time you play us into victory. Come, art with us?"

Now was young Barny at his wits' end. He opened his mouth, but his tongue clave to the roof of it. The scene was like a dream, a dreadful nightmare through which he swam helpless, with Rackham's words hitting like hot hammers on his brain. He had come to a decision; but at the voicing thereof his heart quailed. He swallowed hard, and he moved to the other foot, and his fists clenched the neck of his fiddle.

And at length his head lifted with a kind of desperate pride, and in a husky voice he uttered, "No."

"*What!*" bellowed Rackham, and whipped out his sword again. "Let my tuck persuade thee, sirrah!" And he caught the boy by the nape of the neck and pulled him aft, shouting orders at Shattock as he went.

"Cut those white-livered swine who won't join adrift in their own longboat! Not a drop of water, not a biscuit! Go through the vessel for belly-timber and anything of value. Her papers list hides, fish, and peltry — but I trust not that snivelling Bellamy. Look sharp, Quartermaster; call the *Dragon* alongside and transship aught ye find. Stand by ready to fire the brig the minute I give the word. Now, you!"

This last to Barnaby as they entered the passage leading into the cabin. The inner door lay open, and through it the boy glimpsed the low

square room, paneled, with the broad stern ports giving straight on the open sea set into the farther end, and the great table in the center. Something lay still on the floor, half under the table, and a thin dark streak wound across the planking like a river on a map.

The table top was littered with papers, an opened bottle and two glasses. Rackham laid his rapier on it, sank into the captain's armchair with his back to the ports, and filled a glass. He drained the contents at a gulp, then smacked his lips and wiped them on the back of his hand. His eye found Barnaby, who when released had waited by the door.

" Shut that behind thee."

The lad did so, then turned about, waiting white-lipped for his fate.

" Now then. Is there any imaginable reason why I should not run thee through the gizzard as I stuck that fat pig there? Is there any reason I should not set thee adrift with those others, to die of thirst or be overturned in the next catch of wind? Speak up!"

" None," says Barny, very low.

" Huh!" Rackham downed another glass. " And yet — why won't ye join, then?"

Before the lad could answer there was a knocking at the door. " Who's there?" cried Rackham.

A sailor opened, and pulled at his forelock. "Quartermaster's compliments, and she's full to the eyes wi' rum, small arms, ball and powder!" says he, grinning.

"Ho! Good news! There's villainy for ye! There's the hangdog look of yonder carcass explained! An innocent trader, forsooth! He'll ferry his arsenal down to New Providence haven, and he'll trade it in there for Spanish gold and plate which, when he hies him back to his godly Boston, who's the wiser! Nay, but we cotched him at a bargain!" Rackham's laughter filled the room and floated out the open ports into the dusk.

Barny's eyes had opened wide. Certain matters were, to him also, falling clear.

"Orders, Cap'n?" quoth the messenger.

"Aye, zounds! Get every cask and case stowed safe aboard the *Dragon*. When that's done, let Shattock serve out a double round of grog and stand by till I give the word — Wait!"

"Aye, sir?"

"Is the brig's longboat away?"

"Just now castin' off, Cap'n."

"Let Shattock tell off a squad to take pot shots at her from the crosstrees. And say to every hand of the brig's crew that joined, he'd best thank his lucky star to have turned *honest* pirate in time! Begone!"

The door closed again. Almost directly thereafter, huzzahs were heard on deck, and the rataplan of musketry.

Barnaby's heart turned faint at this wanton butchery, and his lip curled with scorn for that arrant knave who slouched at his ease in murdered Bellamy's chair. The lad misdoubted, though, whether those brutal shots were finding any mark. Outside, the swift tropic night had all but fallen, and there was as yet no moon.

Rackham stood up and lighted the lantern swinging over the table. "To return," says he calmly, licking his lips over yet another glass, "why won't ye join?"

Then, surrounded by evil on every side, with the seafaring life on the *Fancy* that he had thought at the least honest, knocked at a blow from under him, Barny gave way to the flood of bitterness that engulfed his spirit.

"Enough of this foolish talk!" he burst out madly. "'Tis none of my doing that I be here in your cruel clutches!" Spots of anger burned in his cheeks, his head was high and proud. "Have your will with me, you cowardly murderer! Slay me — strike quick! And give me peace!" In his despair he had stepped to the table, actually snatched up Rackham's sword and was offering its hilt to him. "Take it — strike! I'll not join! I will not! I will not!"

Rackham fell a-laughing softly. "Hey, the lad's a very tartar!" He crossed his arms, enjoying himself hugely. "Put down that Toledo, child, before thou scratch thy pretty fingers. There. Now tell me how cam'st thou aboard here. None of thy doing, eh? Whose, then? Speak up!"

Barny bit his lip. He had no mind to treat further with this rogue that slaughtered men for pleasure. Yet one thing persuaded him. To his hands, here in this desperate strait, had come sure proof of Old Nick's perfidy. If he could get home, by hook or by crook, he had it in his power now to bring that pious-seeming old ruffian to justice.

So he drew a breath and began, in a lower and more civil voice, to tell his tragical adventure. Only, of the treasure locked up in that secret chamber under Scarlett's Wharf, he had resolved to say nothing. Certes, it would not help matters to make its presence known to Rackham! Instead, he enlarged upon his kidnapping, telling every detail.

While he talked, from without came sundry bumpings and heavy steps and orders as the pirate craft was warped alongside and the work of transferring the brig's cargo was begun. While he talked, Rackham watched him with unswerving eyes, sipping his rum and now and again

nodding at some point in the narrative. Beyond the wide windows at Rackham's back, black night had fallen, and far out on the horizon lay a misty sheen as of a coming moon.

" — And so here I be," the lad concluded dully.

Rackham set down his glass. " That may or may not be true," says he carelessly. "I'll tell ye what I'll do. It appears ye look on this berth I offer as a favor to me! I'll have ye know I'd not ask every young clodhopper to share my table and fiddle on my poop. Look you! I have a mind for music. Strike up and let us test thine artistry. Here's a promise. If ye can play Jack Rackham to sleep, he'll bind himself to hold ye only till he makes some port where he can set y' ashore and started homewards. But if ye fail " — the black eyes narrowed, glinting — " why, since persuasion's no avail, I'll just let ye stop aboard here, and we'll set flame to the craft and leave you to roast your impudent hide. I feel," he added, " sleepy."

Then willingly could Barny have let fiddle and bow fly through the open windows! Never had he felt less like making melody. But there was a chance here; 'twould be the part of a fool to refuse it. With so much rum already in the man, it would require small effort to play him into slumber.

He swung up his bow and began.

Rackham's elbows propped on the table, his chin rested in his palms as he studied the performer unwinkingly. The boy played every piece he knew, and started over. His arm tired, his fingers stiffened, but he kept on, heartened by a yawn, watching hopefully to see those eyelids across the table droop and close.

Out on deck behind him, the noise of moving men had ceased as if the workers had tired, or else had finished shifting the brig's contraband. Only the strains of his fiddle broke the stillness as a great round moon peeped over the sea's edge and mounted slowly, a giant's eye looking through the stern ports at those two in the *Fancy's* cabin.

" The Turnip-hoer " danced through its merry staves for the third time. Barny had played most of the others twice — " Tree in the Wood," " Lillibullero," " Three Ravens," and the rest. Wearied in body and spirit, on he fiddled doggedly, hardly hearing what he played.

Rackham was nodding! His lids had half dropped, his body sagged against the table. The sight gave Barny new strength. His arms were afire, the sweat stood on his forehead, his bow stumbled on the strings. Yet he urged his aching muscles on, playing softly and more softly, watching that still figure through red-rimmed and desperate eyes. . . .

But of a sudden something drew his gaze away.

He glanced over Rackham's head, and at what he saw his arms sank to his sides, and his mouth fell open in a gasp of incredulous amazement.

Upon the instant the music ceased, Rackham jerked awake, rubbing his eyes and yawning. "Argh-h-h — "

But in mid-yawn he caught the look in the lad's eyes, stony-fixed above and behind him; and then in a flash Jack Rackham's body has slithered round to face the ports.

A man's head topped the sill there, black against the golden moon.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN WITH THE CANE

RACKHAM was quick as a snake, but the rum in him was quicker. Even as his body turned, one hand was snatching his remaining charged pistol (he had emptied the other into poor Cocklyn) from his sash. But he fired too soon, before his fumed and sleep-befuddled head could sense that abrupt change of position. The ball splintered the glass above the intruder's head.

The cabin rocked amain with the thunder of that shot. A moment later, as if it had been a signal, out on deck there rose a very bedlam of cries and a fusillade of musketry.

And then the man outside had leaped nimbly into the room, and Rackham, with a snarl of fury,

had snatched his rapier off the table, and the two were gone together by the ears.

You may believe Barnaby watched that fight with his heart in his mouth, agape as much at the manner of the stalwart stranger as at his skill and courage. He had no slightest inkling who the man might be, but from the moment of his leap and charge he loved him like a brother.

The stranger had, as it were, risen out of the very sea at an hour of darkest extremity. His plain black garments contrasted sharply with the scarlet of his adversary, as did the gallant smile on his face and his twinkling gray eyes with the black looks of the pirate. He was tall, his cheeks were pale and shadowed as by privation. Yet he bore himself with the pride of a lord, with the grace of a dancing master. And so agile was he, so flashing quick his thrusts and parries, that the engagement had ended before Barnaby could glimpse with what outlandish manner of weapon the stranger had fought it.

Jack Rackham was no tyro at swordplay, but here he had found his master. Gasping, cursing a steady stream of foulness, he employed every trick of fence his dulled wits could marshal. He feinted, he stabbed with bent knee, he crossed and cut with savage daring. Yet ever and always the lean black-clad body evaded his steel's reach, ever and always the sinewy wrist foiled him.

Till, blind with anger, he staked all on a last attempt. Crouching almost to the floor, his blade leaped upward like an adder's tongue —

And then as if by some necromancy it had flown out of his grasp and whirled through the ports into the sea. Rackham staggered back, his arm to the shoulder tingling, defenceless.

" So! " quoth the tall stranger coolly, still smiling and with even breath, " we shall talk, *mon ami.*" And bowing Rackham to a chair, he laid his silver-headed walking stick of ebony across the table so lately occupied by the other's tempered steel, and seated himself.

You must now recall to mind that, as these two fell a-fighting, sounds of a more general attack had penetrated the cabin. Throughout the duel these sounds had increased in number and intensity — cries, mad poundings of feet on deck, shots, and the clash of steel on steel rising to an uproar which, when the brief contest within had reached its conclusion, at once pressed through panels with the force of an avalanche upon hitherto unheeding ears.

Rackham leaned panting against the table and with his smoking gaze on the stranger listened to those sounds.

" Who — are ye? " he breathed hoarsely.

" My name? It is Benoit. And you now have the advantage of me, sir."

Rackham paid no heed to the implied request. His eyes bored into the sunny smile of his conqueror as if they would transfix the brain that had been his undoing.

" How are ye come here? " he rasped.

The stranger shrugged. " But that is a long dull tale, my friend. Is it enough to say that we are fast alongside you, that my courageous mates are even now subduing — ? "

As if awakening from stupor, Rackham loosed a howl of insensate rage and whirled for the door.

" Ah, no," says the man Benoit lightly, reaching for his cane; but what in truth stopped Rackham was, even as he sprang away from the table, a heavy pounding on the outer panel. He paused, unarmed as he was, chewing his mustachio.

The stranger's eye lighted then for the first time upon Barny, clutching his fiddle and still staring wide-eyed at all this as he stood by the door.

" Open, lad," says he mildly.

The door swung inward to admit a deal of rank powder smoke, the dregs of the fracas beyond, and a lean and shabby man of short stature with a bandage round his head, whose eye lit with eager recognition of the stranger at the table. Him he addressed respectfully:

" All went as planned, sir. The most of them were too far in drink to know what was upon

them. Our casualties are light, theirs inconsiderable. They are fast below hatches. Both vessels," he added with a grin, "be well stocked with vittles."

" Well done, Salter. Bid all hands fall to and eat their fill. Post a guard over the prisoners and stand by for orders."

" But are you — ? Shall I — ? " The man's eye ranged doubtfully from Rackham to Barnaby.

" No, no, Bos'n. This — ah, gentleman and I must talk. As for the lad, why he looks harmless. Go ease your hunger, *mon brave*. Say I'll join them by and by."

The door closed. Benoit turned to Rackham again. " You see? " he said.

But the redoubtable Captain Calico Jack, hero of a hundred surprise attacks and sallies and boardings, and ardent follower of his own devilish whim, did not yet see the rough truth that stared him in the face. Or if he saw, he would not admit it.

" See? " he choked. " See what? Nay, but I'll have 'ee know ye'll pay dearly — Split my weasand, how have ye done this? "

" Why thus, all clear and simple. In your hot pursuit of the brig you paid no heed to our little sail. We drew nigh at dusk, and I saw what was toward. When night fell and your men were

overbusied with the cargo and their rum, we drew gently alongside, grappling the brig's unoccupied flank — for your own craft lay lashed to the other. I had seen that rich cloak of yours from my masthead, and I knew you had retired to the cabin. God has given me good legs, and I climbed the brig's rudder to her ports yonder to seek you here, whilst the others planned the main surprise and did as you now know. Could aught be simpler?" And the man Benoit smiled his frank and open smile.

"But why — but why?" Rackham thundered. The notion of a man such as he being boarded and taken was still beyond his powers. He, Jack Rackham, terror of the seas, caught in a trap by a grinning coxcomb with a stick!

Benoit's face had sobered. He leaned over the table.

"My friend," says he, "were you ever starving?"

"Ho! So that's where the wind lays!" Rackham seemed mightily relieved. In his bewilderment he had gone so far as to wonder if this stranger mightn't be some officer of the law! "Then you're from the seas yourself! You're on the account too!" His dark face was clearing every minute, now.

But Benoit looked puzzled. "Certainly," he said, "I am come from the seas. But as for the

account, I — why, I am on my own account, I suppose."

"Nay, put it your own way," Rackham chuckled, well used to hesitation in testimony that might lead to sun-drying on some warship's yardarm or at Wapping. "Whate'er ye call it, ye're one of us, and there's my fist on 't!"

And to Barny's amazement, the man in the red cloak, all smooth smile and glittering eye, suited action to the word. As for Benoit, he accepted the offered hand with the best grace in the world. "A friend is always welcome," he murmured, a shade vaguely.

"Now then, Cap'n, what's your will with us?" Rackham pulled up a chair to the table with a brisk air of getting down to business.

"Nothing so great," Benoit replied with a smile and a shrug. "I have told you what we chiefly require is food. With that procured, I had thought we should part, each in his own vessel, and still friends, I hope?"

For a moment Rackham stared at him, incredulous. Then a fleet and subtle change came over the man. Barnaby, watching closely, saw the black eyes narrow and the hard face set itself in a glossy smile. From the part of bluff and hearty vanquished, in that moment Rackham had turned to one of humble satellite — a far more dangerous rôle.

"Look at him! *Look* at him!" silently the lad implored Benoit. But Benoit wouldn't look at him; his eye had fallen on the brig's papers lying there on the table, and he had picked them up and was glancing through them.

"Part? Come, come, Cap'n!" Rackham rallied him softly. "By heaven's bounty, but that were a foolish plan. Look ye, sir. Here be you with devil knows how many lusty hands — "

"Two score five," Benoit gave him, looking up from his papers.

"Two score five!" Rackham blinked, laughably, at the thought of how his own invincible forces, augmented by recruits from the brig, had been outdone by this handful; but soon enough regained his poise. "Two score five men cooped up in some sort of shallop so small that my lookout — "

"A fifty-ton snow, the *Rose,* and a very pretty sailer," Benoit interrupted with a formal bow. "You were saying?"

"Uh — to be sure! Now here be I with better than a hundred hands and two stout ships. To make a long matter brief, why not scuttle the snow and join forces?"

Over clasped hands Benoit regarded the ceiling. "Under what relationship — as to you and me?" he inquired.

Again that smooth sly look, which Barnaby

caught and Benoit apparently missed. Then: "Why, Cap'n," quoth Rackham, with every appearance of candor, "Calico Jack's not the man to deny when he's bested. I want nothing better'n to ship as your lieutenant. Under that relationship, says I."

Benoit tapped the *Fancy's* papers with his long strong fingers. "Well and good," says he cheerfully — "with one exception. 'Twere wanton foolishness to sink my *Rose*. For the brig here must go back to her owners."

"Eh? By Moses, there's a jest! I tell 'ee, sir, she's a lousy smuggler! Look there on her manifest — hides, fish, peltry. And I tell 'ee she was crammed with small arms and rum for Providence haven!"

"I care naught for that. I have no quarrel with British merchantmen, and I'll not be a party to taking one. Home she goes."

Rackham giggled, jerking a thumb under the table. "She lacks a skipper," he remarked slyly.

Benoit bent and saw. He sucked in his breath sharply. "Ah, ah! A pity. . . ." A frown clouded his honest face. "Never mind. The mate can sail her."

"And," continued Rackham in a tiny voice, "she lacks a crew."

"Nay, that she does not! I picked up the long-

boat. Her men seemed willing enough to bear a hand with us in this night's — "

" Burn my liver! Ye — " But again Rackham caught himself in time, and swallowed his chagrin. For a space he studied the calm and frank features of the man who sat across the table.

" Cap'n," he said at last, and his tone was as melting butter, " say we leave the brig go, then. Is it a bargain? "

Benoit gave him a radiant smile. " So be it," says he. Then he got up from the table. " And now that is settled, if you will excuse me, I think I shall go find the galley. Trade has been slow of late, and for a fact I have not enjoyed a meal in three days."

" With all my heart, sirrah! " Rackham had jumped up too, and was ushering him grandly toward the door. " I could stow a snack myself. But — one question more, Cap'n. Ye say ye have no quarrel with merchantmen. Who then *do* ye go for? "

Halting in the doorway, Benoit looked down upon that lean dark face with all the innocent sincerity of a child.

" *Nom d'un chien!* But that is a quaint question, my friend," he marveled slowly. " For the most part I go for — well, such as you! "

Then the door cut off Rackham's gasp, and

Barnaby found himself rubbing his eyes at the empty cabin.

The first gray flush of dawn was creeping in the stern ports.

CHAPTER VII

BARNY GOES ON THE ACCOUNT

When wounds had been dressed and his men had stayed their hunger, Benoit addressed all hands — and they comprised above two hundred souls — from the *Fancy's* poop balustrade.

At his elbow stood Rackham, darkly suave and smiling as if to himself. From the cabin doorway Barnaby listened to the slow, calm words of the man who had saved his life — of the man who could conquer a desperate pirate with a cane — and the lad's heart swelled with admiration and devotion.

Begging their indulgence, Benoit spoke of his youth. Born a younger son of French-English parents, at an early age he had left the University of Angiers to follow the sea.

" At that time," he reminded them, " France and England were at swords' points with Spain and Holland, and the ship on which I sailed was a commissioned privateer to prey upon the vessels of those enemy nations."

Early he had been struck, he told them, by the likeness of privateering to piracy. " To my youthful innocence," says he with that friendly smile, " it appeared that every man and every nation was his neighbor's enemy. When we captured a prize, the loot was divided and all hands made merry. Sometimes the vessel was sailed into port and sold, sometimes not. We took prisoners, but often enough they joined us in our venture, regardless of nationality. So I conceived an honest hatred for this legalized thievery and slaughter, and for the selfishness of rulers and bickering statesmen that brought it about. I became," he said calmly, " a citizen of humanity, vowing allegiance to no country but to an idea."

Be sure they gaped, that motley horde of seagoing riffraff; they scowled in bewilderment. What was this preachment, who was this seafaring parson? But when he spoke of the wickedness of governments, they commenced to look more cheerful. There was a matter they understood. As for this idea — well, they would see. If there was plunder in it —

" About that time," Benoit was saying, " my

ship was captured and I was branded and sold into slavery on the Main." With these words he extended his arms, and on each palm his hearers saw the seared brown letters " E S C " — grim abbreviation of the Spanish *esclavo,* which damned a man to lifelong bondage.

A low growl of sympathy ran through the throng. They were quieter, more intent, as Benoit again took up his narrative.

Well then, for fifteen years he had labored in the gold mines of his Spanish masters, almost dying of privation and cruel treatment. And here it was that his former faith found confirmation in the conviction that all men were born, and should remain, free.

He escaped with a small band of fellow sufferers, to find that peace had been declared during his imprisonment and privateering was now called by an uglier name. All nations were now joined in an attempt to put down those hardy souls who, unmindful of treaties, were continuing practices which, so lately smiled upon by their rulers, had brought them rich livings.

" My country had disowned and forgotten me," he said sadly. " I could not starve on the Porto Bello foreshore. Torture and return to slavery awaited discovery by any ship upon the seas. So my mates and I took this small vessel " — he indicated the snow alongside — " without bloodshed,

and by night we sailed away, determined to live — and live honestly."

In short, there was but one course open to them. The sea was the only trade they knew, and merchants would have none of them but to return them to their former captors. Thereupon they dedicated their lives to the only honest pursuit they could find, that of privateering among pirates — wresting a livelihood, and no more, from outlaws and thieves.

The effect of this statement upon its hearers was remarkable. Those hard-bitten sea dogs were aghast. But not angered: 'twas the temerity of Benoit's idea that impressed them. Not a soul among them but who admired courage. Here, in good truth, was courage such as they had never dreamed! After the first gasp of amazement, a deep-throated rumble of approbation ran through the audience. And as Benoit went on to explain his plan in detail, something like enthusiasm sprang up here and there and grew apace.

He had conceived a white ensign, he said, with "Liberty" painted in the fly, and the motto *A Deo a Libertate* as an emblem of the band's uprightness and their resolution to assert the freedom which God had given them. He had drawn up articles, or laws, to which every member of this seafaring commonwealth must swear fealty.

He would coerce no man. Those who wished might join him, and those who refused might sail peaceably away in this stout brig to Boston Town, where doubtless they might find employment.

"Articles! Articles!" went the cry. "Let's hear 'em!"

Then Barnaby, who had stolen out to where he could get a sight of the man, saw Benoit draw a sheaf of papers from his black coat. Waiting until stillness descended, the tall stranger commenced to read in a voice low but perfectly clear.

"'The purpose of this Free State shall be to secure for its members a decent livelihood upon the high seas by righting the wrongs committed by Pirates upon peaceable Merchantmen, by exacting the requisites of life from the said Pirates, by granting the said Pirates permission to join, and by wherever possible aiding the weak and oppressed against the strong and proud.

"'Its Government shall be vested in a Council, which shall be composed of all Petty Officers and Officers of the State's vessels.

"'But all meetings of the Council shall be public, and every Man shall have a vote in affairs of moment.

"'All monies, stores, arms, and other goods taken shall constitute a common fund reserved for the Free State, and are subject to return to their lawful Owners or division among the citizens as

the Council shall provide. No Man shall acquire aught for personal gain.

" ' Every Man shall upon his honor swear allegiance to the foregoing articles, and shall furthermore subscribe to the following oath governing his personal conduct: *I will serve God and this Free State, obey my Superiors, befriend my Fellows and champion the weak and oppressed with cheerful heart and ready hand. I will keep my arms bright, my body strong, my spirit brave in the face of danger. So help me God.*

" ' Infringement of any of the above articles shall be punished by death or banishment from the State.

" ' Whereunder we, the following, sworn Members of this Free State, have set our names or marks:

" ' André Paul Benoit, Captain

" ' Manuel Lopez, Quartermaster

" ' Jonathan Salter, Boatswain

" ' James Neal (His Mark) . . .' "

So the reading continued until the last signatory to those strange laws had been announced, and Benoit laid down the papers on a table, where also a quill and inkhorn had been provided.

" Let those who refuse to join," said he, " go forward to the fo'csle out of the way. As for any who may be with us, let them come up this larboard companion, and as they pass the table I

will take their oaths and they can sign these articles and pass on down the starboard ladder."

On deck there arose a buzz of doubt, and in some quarters hoots and jeers. In truth, here were the queerest articles of governance ever set before a parcel of lusty fellows.

"No looting, eh?" men grumbled. "No dice or gaming, no carousing! Split me, parlous times are come upon us, mates! But how if we refuse? Worse, worse! To Boston, quoth 'ee, to Boston Town where pirates be hanged and every soul must hie to meeting or be whipped at the post! Od's blood! I know not how to choose! What say, mates?"

But Barny heard none of this. Throughout that reading he had been all eyes and ears. At its end he made pell-mell for the larboard ladder.

For there was no shadow of a doubt in his own mind. Articles or no, he was ready to follow that smiling calm fellow in black to the ends of the earth!

Rackham, standing with arms folded (he had already signed) saw him coming and greeted him with a sardonic smirk and a whisper. "I see there be more than one way of skinning a cat!"

But Captain Benoit laid friendly hand upon his shoulder. "Ha! The lad with the fiddle! Come, art certain, *mon enfant?* Perchance there'll be tough times ahead for one of thy tender

years." Behind his smile there lay a searching look.

"Aye, sir! Certain as cinnamon!" gasps Barny, all breathless eager, reaching out for the quill.

"Good, then." Showing him where to set his name, the man in black administered the oath upon him. "'Barnaby Vane,' eh? A stout name, Barny. I'll add 'musician' — that puts thee in our council."

And he gripped the boy's fist warmly, and sent him on his way.

"Who's next, men?"

A plenty were next, as it proved. For of the brig's men those more adventurous souls who had cast in their lot with Rackham, having now already tasted the fickleness of piratical fortunes, showed themselves eager enough to sign on for a cruise, daring to please the foolhardiest yet less likely to end in hanging. And most of Calico Jack's own hands, confronted by the choice between Boston and Benoit, were minded to regard the latter as the lesser of these two evils.

But Barnaby paid no longer any heed to doings on the brig's quarter-deck. His own destiny was shaped, and to his satisfaction. Another matter concerned him now.

He had often thought how shameful it was that his parents should have no knowledge of his where-

abouts, supposing very likely that he had ungratefully run away to sea. (Albeit he knew not what unassailable argument to that belief they had already received through Hornigold's letter and wicked ruse.) To make amends as best he could, Barnaby had resolved at the first opportunity to send back a message that would clear his conduct and relieve his parents' fears.

And now the *Fancy* brig was going home, and here lay his chance.

Having seen writing materials among the clutter on the table in the great cabin, he slipped aft unnoticed and set himself to the task.

" My deer Father & Mother," he wrote, never being much of a draughtsman — and paused to chew the quill, scratch his tousled head, and consider. The sunlight coming in the stern ports sent long bars of yellow radiance pointing at the body of poor Bellamy, the coward, so still there by the end of the table. From outside drifted in the hum and stir of that business on deck.

Should he tell all? No, time was lacking. Face to face with his parents he could have explained this matter in a trice. But to set it in a letter — somehow he lacked words — somehow the tale would sound false, incredible. Well, he must do the best he could.

" I implor You to beleeve that my Leaving Home was none of my Doing. By Force was I

taken from old " — he scratched out the last word — " from Mr. Hornigold's house & impress'd aboard this Vessel for a voyage I knew not whither. The cause of my trapanning was a certain Matter which had come to my knowledge in the counting — "

At a cry from outside Barny quickly lifted his head.

" Cast off, there! "

So soon? Yet he must finish — In great haste he scrawled a few more words:

" — which You will comprehend if only You will ope the great Chist that stands against the Wall at the seaward end of H's inner room. I pray You go there with the Constable or any — no more I have not time, from your faithfull Barny."

Down to him was coming the measured tramp of feet and the yo-hoing of men at tacks and halyards. His fingers stumbled as they folded and addressed the missive. Catching up his fiddle, he bolted out of the cabin, to find the snow clear, the *Fancy's* courses being sheeted home, and the grappling irons to larboard where loomed Rackham's *Flying Dragon* already loosed from their clutch of the brig's bulwarks.

All was noise and confusion, men running, Rowse bellowing from his poop, and the big gray sails slatting as if eager to be off. Barny's frantic

eye lighted on Black Robin, standing apart by the rail.

" Here! " he cried breathlessly, and pressed the folded paper on the wondering mulatto. Tucking fiddle and bow unceremoniously beneath his doublet, he leaped for the *Dragon's* shrouds.

He caught and hung on. Turning, " Rob! " he shouted, " deliver that for me, there's a good lad. My father will " — he hooked an elbow in the rigging to get a fist cupped about his mouth — " my father will pay you nobly! "

To his relief the black nodded, grinning, and waved farewell.

Still clinging to the *Dragon's* ratlines, then, Barnaby turned his head to glance down upon her busy decks. And at what he saw his body stiffened, and his eyes narrowed with distaste.

Calico Jack Rackham and his quartermaster Shattock, taking no part in the business of getting under way, had their heads together just beneath him. They crouched by the bulwark, all dark glances and lop-sided little grins, a-whispering — a-whispering.

Now what should this mean? thinks Barny. So intent was he upon the spectacle of a commander and his chief officer engaged in gossip as their craft cleared, that he missed a circumstance even more significant, which was at that very moment happening on the deck of the fast departing brig.

Matt Rowse, newly made master of the *Fancy,* with orders to sail her back to Boston, had been stamping up and down her poop, swinging his arms and bawling orders with great relish as he put the vessel under sail.

Now he stood stock-still. Now, over folded arms, his thick back squarely to the two ships he had just left, he scowled down upon the Barbados cook, who lingered by the rail with a small paper in his dark fingers. Now Rowse's gaze fastened on that paper with a bright look of speculation. And muttered words rose to his lip:

"'Nobly,' eh? Cooper Vane pay — *nobly?* Split ye, Rowse old cockerel, but this here letter will bear inspeckshun!"

CHAPTER VIII

"A FLAT SHOT TO PART"

THAT night a public meeting of the council was held aboard the *Flying Dragon.*

Land had been sighted at noonday — one of the lesser Abacos which flank Bahama Bank. The light airs of the last few days had freshened, and by mid-afternoon a sea was running that made anchorage welcome to Benoit's modest squadron. As the sun was setting the two ships roared down upon a palm-fringed, sandy cay, doubled it, and bore up into a placid wooded inlet from which a cloud of scarlet flamingos rose screaming at their approach. They moored there, rail to rail in six fathoms, on the *Dragon's* anchor.

After supper all hands were piped aboard the bigger craft. Her barricade of canvas was rolled

up, the council took seats around the great cabin table, and all the citizens of that sea-going commonwealth (save only the anchor watch above) found room in the wide steerage adjoining, where they could see and hear what passed within the cabin.

To young Barnaby, well nigh hidden in the throng about that table, it was a thrilling scene. A battle lantern overhead lit the wide room flickeringly, made of the steerage a shadowy sea of upturned faces. Smell of men and tobacco smoke hung heavy on the air. And over all trembled a voice as of far-off thunder — constant, sullen, booming — and that was the surf beyond the bar.

Captain Benoit arose from his chair at the head of the table to open the meeting. Upon his right, as befitted the second in command, Rackham slouched negligent, his head inclined meekly as he caressed his long silky mustachios with jeweled, dirty fingers. To his left sat the man called Salter, formerly Benoit's bos'n but now appointed master and artist of the *Dragon;* he was a shabby and slight-statured fellow, but with a clear cool eye under the bandage that still swathed his head, and a stubborn jaw.

Barny hardly heard the captain's opening words. His eyes were busy about this table. He knew that Gabe Shattock, Rackham's quartermaster, now surlily chewing opposite him near

the foot of the table, had set his heart on the master's berth. He caught the contrast between the sleek red-cloaked renegade on Benoit's right and that staunch supporter to his left. He knew, moreover, that out yonder in the steerage the leader's little band of original followers was outnumbered nearly three to one.

It occurred to him to count noses about that table, to see how the land lay in the council here; for he could not forget the look he had seen on Rackham's face, last night, which Benoit had not seen. Under the surface of this meeting he thought he felt men's wills crawling evilly, like worms in a clod.

But there proved little to support the fear. Counting himself, there were fourteen ranged about the table. Nine were come off Benoit's little *Rose*. In the faces of the others, Shattock and Rackham excepted, he could see no opposition or any guile.

He picked them out. There was the surgeon, a dark Spaniard turned pirate perforce out of some captured galleon, a timid fellow and sad-faced, who gave himself the title of Don Mendazo. And there was coxswain Jeffreys, fat and round as a barrel, with a red scrubbed face and a thrum cap perched atop his big bald head. And here, alongside himself, sat one Lumley the gunner, a huge hulk bare to the waist with mermaids blue-

pricked all about his hairy arms and chest. All three listened gaping to Benoit, as it were stupid but harmless.

As for the others, Benoit's men: why, there were Manuel Lopez, the swarthy Portuguese quartermaster; Carpenter Neal and Caulker Watts, two big-fisted Englishmen, from the Bristol yards before hard times had overhauled them; a gaunt Italian called something like Carracioli, who had been chosen to fill Salter's place as bos'n; and a porky little man in a popish monk's robe of coarse cloth, with a silver crucifix at his breast, whom all hands hailed "*padre*" with mingled banter and respect, and who filled the strangely combined ranks of chaplain and armorer.

A motley lot. Aye, but sturdy and honest-seeming fellows, every man jack of them watching their calmly smiling, black-clad leader with the fire of undying devotion in their eyes.

Yet was that all? No. Barny saw that he had overlooked a man hard by, on the other side of him from Lumley. He glanced that way now, and at the same time his neighbor looked up, forsooth, to wink at Barny with the wryest and oddest grimace in the world.

Barny grinned back, and wiggled his ears at him — at which the fellow must needs clap fist to mouth or burst out a-roaring.

A hunchback! Round, brown, droll as a Mala-

bar monkey, with big quick hands on his long arms, a merry twinkle wrinkling up his bright blue eye, and such an air about him you could tell he counted his pitiful deformity as of no matter at all.

"Whisht, sur!" he confided behind a hairy hand, "if them bain't the comicalest brace av eavesdroppers old Jem's set eye to since Galway 'sizes! Wance more, now."

But Barny shook his head, fearing to draw general attention to his antics. "Later," he whispered. "What's your rank aboard, Jem?" For he couldn't but wonder how a cripple took room at the council table.

The bright blue Irish eyes twinkled with pride. "Rank, is ut?" says Jem, and thrust a hand inside his tattered doublet to withdraw and exhibit some sort of wind instrument, a flageolet or fife, by its bone mouthpiece. "Rank, is ut?" Tenderly the hunchback's thumb rubbed his treasure.

"Look 'ee. Is ut a jig ye'll be havin' fur weighin' anchor? Or a stirrin' chune when that ye clearrs decks fur action, or a dead marrch when ye gits through? Ha! Call up Jem; he'll rouse 'em!" Having whispered this gallant advertisement, the big brown head nodded sagely. "Rank, is ut? Moosician, sur." That closed the matter.

Here's a whack of luck, thinks Barny. Catching Jem's eye, he scooched him down beneath the table's lip, twigged his fingers and drew bow in dumb show of fiddling. "We'll be a pair, then, Jem," he chuckled.

"Whisht, sur!" When Jem said that, his eyes popped. "A fiddler, begorry! Will the pair av us tickle their heels then?"

"Devil doubt it, old jug!"

They giggled like conspirators, nudging each other in the ribs — then abruptly turned sober faces and attentive ears to the meeting as they realized that business of moment was afoot.

"— As for the *Rose,*" the captain was saying, "I know well she is foul and needs careening. Like enough this craft would profit thereby also. These tropical waters be rank with growth, and 'twere the part of wisdom to make all tight and sweet beneath us now that chance offers, else we may find our navy aleak at a moment when it suits us least. I have in mind a spot not many leagues from here —"

"Craving the captain's pardon!" The interruption came in the furry tone of Calico Jack, who had risen to his feet and stood awaiting recognition. In the pause, from the steerage could be heard a vague movement as of applause and expectancy.

"I will not deny the need of careening," con-

tinued Rackham blandly, as soon as Benoit had bidden him proceed. "But our stores are low. Moreover, 'tis the season when those poor piratical wretches" — he lent these words emphasis, drooping one corner of his mouth in a sarcastic leer — "from whom we must wrest our living are thick as flies about the Straits to west'ard, laying in wait for the Spanish treasure ships homing from the Main. Now no man can fight on an empty belly, as ye of the *Rose* snow well know. An I may be so bold, a better plan were this: sally forth first, assure ourselves of provender, then to haven, careen and boot-top and refit at our leisure."

He sat down, and there was an approving murmur — though whether for that portion of his remarks bearing on food, or that of Spanish galleons, remained in doubt. In the shadowy steerage a body could be heard whispering, and another choked off a snort of laughter with his fist.

Instantly Barny recalled how strangely willing Rackham's men had been to join this enterprise. Upon the heels of that thought returned to him the picture of Rackham and Shattock furtively hobnobbing under the *Dragon's* bulwark as she made sail. His suspicions fell upon him with a rush.

Benoit was frowning, but more as if in puzzlement. "Nay, but provender a-plenty can be

found ashore," he objected. " The island I have in mind teems with game, the waters — "

Gabe Shattock hove his bulk aloft and stood with fists shored on the table top, the livid scar athwart his face working up and down with the steady grinding of his jaw.

" By yer leave, Cap'n," he growled, taking a pull at his forelock. " Now what I says, do both. Heave down one ship with t'other. Then leave some hands for to scrape her that lays careened whilst her consort stands off to sea a-foragin'. Back she comes betimes, and change about. Hey? " On the last word the man's eyes, which had been but two greenish sparks in the folds of flesh engulfing them, suddenly came wide.

Approval loudened into gruff cries of " Aye, aye! Bully for you, Quartermaster! " Rackham himself nodded eagerly, and a swift potent look passed between him and his man. But Benoit's face did not lighten.

" Separate? That plan likes me ill, men. I believe — "

Then Barnaby sprang to his feet, unable to contain himself a moment longer. " Ah, Cap'n, don't let 'em! I tell you — "

But even as the boy cried out, Jem's warning fist gripped his knee in a clutch of iron. And no less suddenly than he had tumbled into speech, Barny lost all power over his bold tongue. He

saw how impudent had been his conduct — he that was lowest and least at this table. He subsided, mumbling, his face beet red and his eyes downcast.

"You were saying?" Benoit addressed him kindly.

Barny looked up at that, half minded to out with his suspicions, come what might. His eyes met two dagger-like stares of implacable hatred, one from across, one from the upper end of the table.

Shattock and Rackham! Shattock's stained lips were moving. Rackham's hand toyed with the hilt at his sash. Their looks, deadly plain, said, "Sheer off this, or you'll follow Bellamy!"

Barny was no coward. But those glittering savage eyes gave him pause. After all, had he any solid proof to go on?

To the captain's question all the lad could do was stare like a deaf-mute and miserably shake his bewildered head.

"Would any others be heard, then?" Benoit went on. None, seemingly. A voice in the steerage called for a vote.

"We are to choose between two plans," the captain explained. "For the one, it is to hold together in a single body, clean our ships, and fare forth to sea. For the other, it is to divide, and clean and forage in turn." He turned to him

dressed in monkish garb. "Padre, make ready the ballots."

The little priest stood up promptly, pleased with his office. In one fat hand he held a leathern bullet pouch, and in the other his black skullcap. "Draw from the left, drop in the right," he commenced in a piping chant. "A round shot to bide together and careen, then sail. A flat shot to part and do both at once."

He made for the steerage and began threading his way through the crowd.

"How will you cast your vote, Jem?" As attention moved away from him, Barnaby had sufficiently recovered his composure to whisper the question.

The hunchback regarded him scornfully. "Saints above! Are ye mad, then?" With a big finger, lightning-quick, he drew a circle in the air. "Round," he added solemnly. "Round fur the plan av him who fetched this old carcass outen the pain av hell." With these words his palm fell open, and there, deep-bitten, lay the scabby brown brand of slavery, "E S C."

"You were with him on the Main?"

"With him!" The humped body shuddered over some remembered agony. "Aye, begorry!"

Barny gripped the scorched hard fist. But before he could speak, the bullet pouch at the end of a flowing sleeve came between them, and it was

Jem's turn to vote. This he did quickly, muttering.

And now the monk was bending over Barny, and a rattle of Latin was in his ear. He reached into the pouch, felt the leaden balls therein, some smooth and round from the mold, others pounded to thick disk shape. Carefully selecting a perfect bullet, he withdrew his fingers. The clerical arm deftly substituted the skullcap for the pouch, and Barny let fall his ballot inside.

The captain voted last, in accordance with custom. Then there was a pause filled with impatient murmuring as the teller, puffing with his exertions, retired to a corner and amid the clink of metal summed up the result.

By and by he appeared at the captain's shoulder and whispered in his ear. Benoit's face sobered; he made the monk repeat his message. Then he arose with his usual serenity.

"So be it," said he. "We have voted, and let every man abide by the will of the State. The count stands: one hundred and seven votes for parting, sixty for biding whole. We part."

Cheers rose from the steerage. Barnaby saw a look of stealthy triumph flare up for an instant in Rackham's eye.

With his cane Benoit rapped for order. "Inasmuch as Lieutenant Rackham proposed the plan," he continued equably, "'tis but just that

he should command the foraging party whilst I manage the careening. The snow should be his for the venture, for she is the faster sailer and 'twere well to accomplish the bigger part of the cleaning — that is, the ship — first. As for the division of men, I require but two score or so for shore duty whereas he will have need of every stout heart available; let us therefore choose in turn, he and I, till I have fifty men in my party and he fifty in his — whereafter those remaining will accompany him also. Is it agreed?" And he turned courteously toward Rackham.

Rackham, all smiles, could but wave his hand in approval amid the thunder of applause that acclaimed this wise and generous plan. Again Benoit rapped.

"Another matter. Though we divide, it must be agreed that our Free State is to be preserved, one body in spirit, at all costs; that the foraging venture is but a temporary measure, to endure only till such time as captures shall replenish our stores. To this end I shall have a fair copy of our articles prepared to-night and delivered over to Lieutenant Rackham, who shall be charged with their administration among his company until his return. For this I require his oath."

Then amidst increasing enthusiasm, Rackham arose and, as bidden, swore that oath upon a sword.

"Now for the division. Choose first, my friend."

"Shattock," says Calico Jack very quickly.

"And for me, Salter."

"Gunner Lumley," says Rackham.

"Come, Padre," Benoit smiled.

"The surgeon Mendazo — in case of need," says Rackham.

"A shrewd choice. For me, honest Bill Watts the caulker."

Rackham paused, while his gleaming black eyes raked the table. Up to him from the steerage came pleading cries. "Me, Jack! Ye knows yer old matey! Me, Jack, me!"

But the gaze of the man in red had already stopped at a place near the foot of the table.

"Why for the next," he said softly, "methinks I'll have yon talkative Boston fiddler." And behind the fingers that twisted his mustachios, he hid a smile.

CHAPTER IX

OF PLUNDER BURIED AND PLUNDER SOUGHT

"THIS is the place," said Captain Benoit, indicating the unbroken shore of a forested island which the two ships were fast approaching.

"I see no inlet," Rackham objected, scowling under his hand.

"Ah, but wait. There lies its merit."

The captain turned to assure himself that the *Rose* was following closely; then laid his own strong hand to the *Dragon's* wheel. Under his careful guidance the vessel sheered so close to the looming rocks and foliage that it seemed she must strike and founder. Birds wheeled, squawking, overhead; the surf pounded and thrashed, throwing white spray as high as the twisted trees along

that rugged shore. And then, at the last possible moment, a narrow passage opened ahead, and the ship had plunged into it and slid round a sand spit on the right, under a beetling promontory on the left, and so ahead into smooth water.

"*Regardez!*" cried Benoit.

Ahead stretched a deep lagoon bordered on either hand by beaches of white coral sand, and fringed and shaded by the dense foliage of palms and mimosas. The inlet was like a pocket in a jungle. Along the nearer, right-hand bank ran a straggling row of thatched huts.

"Inhabited?" asked Rackham in surprise.

"Only by turtles and wild pigs. The sheds are ours. We fell upon the place by accident, being hard pressed for shelter from a hurricane. We stopped here through the rains. There's a spring at the head of the cove. A pretty nook, eh? 'Tis like — well, like coming home." The gray eyes of the tall adventurer looked suddenly lonely and wistful.

"Humph. 'Twill serve," his lieutenant grunted.

So with a slatting of canvas in that quiet place the *Flying Dragon* backed her main course and ran gently aground. The snow, according to instructions, followed to a point abreast the buildings and dropped an anchor in the stream.

For the next three days every man was busy.

The *Dragon's* guns, ballast, and all other movable gear of any weight were lightered and stored above high water on the beach; then with the aid of the smaller craft and strong tackles gripping the shore, the tall ship was hove down and moored securely. The water casks of the *Rose* were rinsed and filled afresh from the spring at the head of the inlet, against her pending cruise. A hunting party sought turtles' eggs and fresh pork for her, woodcutters stocked the bins in her cookroom with fuel, and under the watchful eye of the sailmaker her canvas and running gear were overhauled and put in repair. Gunner Lumley reinforced her armament with a brace of long guns and four swivels from the ship; his men cleaned and oiled muskets, sharpened pikes and cutlasses, filled her lazaret to bursting with partridge and grapeshot from the *Dragon's* magazine, and even wrought a store of grenado shells by filling bottles with metal scraps and powder and affixing a quick-match fuse in their necks.

On the quarter-deck of his new command, Calico Jack Rackham watched her arming and refitting with ill-concealed impatience. All hands worked unremittingly, from dawn through the blazing heat of noonday and far into the blue velvet night; but their ardor only whetted his own hunger to be off. Back and forth he paced like a great caged cat, his eyes glittering, his

voice snapping curses at some fancied bungle or delay. Back and forth, smiling at his deep thoughts, twisting his mustachios till they curved, black threads, on his sallow cheeks. . . .

For Barny those three days passed swiftly. He had been cheered by the knowledge that Jem was to go a-cruising too; for Rackham had chosen the hunchback at his next opportunity after enlisting "yon fiddler," and Benoit had again concurred with a grim smile, saying the foragers would need all the music the State could muster.

"So," thought Barny, "if I must needs go along with that two-faced rogue, at the least I'll have a mate by me I can pin faith upon." This, too, eased his longing to remain here with the tall, smiling, sober-clad commander who had saved his life and captured his boyish heart.

Yet one matter troubled him and would not down. For himself he cared not overmuch. But his doubts as to the nature of this cruise affected others. It seemed monstrous unfair that Rackham should be offered this chance to put into effect the fell designs which, Barny made certain, the man contemplated and of which Benoit had as yet no suspicion.

What was to prevent Rackham, having secured the fleeter ship and the choicer stores and armory, from sailing merrily away and never returning?

Ah, the lad could just see those copied articles,

which Benoit fondly hoped would govern the snow's venture, burned with mock ceremony on her poop the first night out! And then what? Why, there was but one answer. Have at and capture every misfortunate craft that came within Calico Jack's gluttonous clutches! The old life, and a snap of the fingers for that mad Frenchman's ideas! Loot, snatch it! Gold, roll in it! Yo — ho — ho!

Unfair! It sickened the heart. Barny could not bear to see their leader so duped. He had no real evidence of treachery — naught but those sly looks he had caught and Benoit missed, naught but his knowledge of what Rackham had been before Captain André had ever caught him, naught but all that and his conviction that foul play was afoot here. Yet it was enough to make his life wretched until he had sought out Benoit and, at the risk of appearing a coward and tale-bearer, warned him.

He found the captain in one of the huts — alone, luckily, and half buried in the goods he was sorting and tallying. While he labored he hummed a little tune. Looking up as Barny darkened the doorway, "What, not working?" he bantered; but then, noting the fixed look and white face of his visitor, straightened up and in a voice gone low and quick whispered, "How now, lad? What's amiss?"

"Cap'n," says the boy doggedly, "I like not tittle-tattle. For myself I would not dream — Oh, sir, 'tis only that I believe your undertaking — our undertaking — in grave danger that I bring you this. I have heard — that is, I believe —" So he stammered, at a loss how to begin; then plucked up courage. "Cap'n, there's black work in this foraging venture, I swear it!"

And he told him what he had seen.

At the end there was a silence, stirred from without by the muffled cries of men working, the squeak of cordage, the thud of active hammers. And then all at once the shed was full of Benoit's hearty laughter.

"Nay, boy, but I love thy mettle! A hound for plots, eh? Good lad, good lad! 'S truth, I had my own doubts of this, some days gone. But there's naught in it, naught to fear. Look you, friend —"

He bent close over Barnaby, and his handsome face shone like a seer's with some inner light.

"I have talked long with the lieutenant; I know him like a book. Appearances be against him, that I'll admit. Also that in the past — well, we won't speak of that. But Barny, on this I'll go faith: he's turned away from all that dastardly mischief, he's vowed to live honest, and he will."

You may believe the lad was stunned by this

childish credulity. "Ah, but sir," he blurted out, "I tell 'ee, ye know not — "

"Peace! I know enough," the captain cut him off. "Fie, lad! Would'st have me convict a man for having shifty eyes? — One who's gone on his sainted oath? Why, look you, were all these fancies true, he'd no more think of deserting than he'd lop off his own right arm! "

"And for what reason, sir? " asked Barnaby in scornful amaze.

The captain paused at gaze, catching his lip as if he had said more than prudence allowed and scrutinizing the boy's earnest, upraised look. Then he seemed to make up his mind, for suddenly he touched Barny's shoulder and bent still lower over him.

"For what reason? I'll tell thee. On thy life see it goes no further. Think you Rackham's *Flying Dragon* was when we took her — empty? "

"Uh — why, in truth I had not thought at all. You say — ? "

"Bulging, crammed, stuffed with devil's plunder! He'd been across to the Guinea Coast, and he'd snared two fat Dutchmen and a French trader, and heaven knows how many more on his way back. Aye, open thine eyes, boy. But mind the mouth clamps fast. A dozen armchests there were, packed to the studs with ducatoons and guilders and my own country's fair *louis d'or,*

and dust and bar gold too. Not to mention the bales of silk and the bags — "

"Were?" says Barnaby. "How mean you, were?"

"Were aboard that ship. Are no longer. A white elephant on our hands, Barny. Blood-tainted treasure, ghost-ridden! Yet what would you — destroy it? With men on earth starving, in slavery, that were a crime as great as the first. It should go to the State, we agreed, and be saved against need and a final reckoning. To that end the lieutenant and I and two others — Salter and Shattock — we moved it ashore the first night we lay here, while all hands slept. 'Tis safe hid, too, every *sou* and gaudy scrap and jewel, in a spot no man wots save the four I told you.

"And there's your reason! A hostage! A mighty, nay, an invulnerable bond 'twixt Calico Jack Rackham and our commonwealth. An he were minded to turn traitor — but he's not — still he'd come back, for that!"

Barny gaped at him, struck dumb. In very truth, it was a king of reasons.

"So calm thy fears, Barny." Laughing, Benoit used a natural voice again. "Come, chirk up and look life in the eyes! In a month's time or less the snow will return, and then we'll take a new division, and mayhap 'twill be my turn for foraging and glory. Aye, and I'll have thy fid-

dle, Barny. Mind, I've not heard it yet." And with encouraging thumps on the back, the captain sent him back to work.

Thus it was that at dawn of the fourth day the *Rose* snow put to sea. The *Dragon's* longboat warped her through the channel, and a battery of two cannon, which Benoit had set up on the point to guard the narrow passage, gave her a brave salvo as she passed.

As the wide gray horizon opened ahead, the snow's two musicians were hard at it on her narrow poop, and to their blithe airs men swarmed with a will on halyards and braces. Her canvas spread out, flapping like pretty wings, and fell asleep under the fresh cool breeze. She headed west by north, the trade wind well on her quarter — a course that would thread the islands, skirt close the northerly tip of New Providence, and cutting athwart the Great Bahama Bank lead her into the Straits of Florida.

If any one marked that choice of direction, nothing was said. As all hands knew, the Straits were the region where buccaneers plied the busiest. For the Straits, too, lay in the eastbound track of the galleons of Spain, which timidly hugged the coast from Vera Cruz and Porto Bello to avoid the head winds of the Caribbean and get their northing before setting the great circle course across the stormy Atlantic for home. In heading

for the hawks, Rackham could not but make also for the fat pigeons on which they preyed.

The man stood by his tiller, motionless and inscrutable.

Barnaby looked back, once, at Benoit's island. Already it had become a mere hump of forest and ledges presenting an unbroken front to the long sea roll. But in the level rays of the rising sun astern, just at the spot where the secret channel cut between the point and the headland, he descried a thin black mark that made the figure of a man. 'Twould be the captain, he knew, standing there alert and still, smiling, watching the venture out of sight.

What a man was there! That slow smile, that long straight look he gave you: innocent as a child's, shrewd as a miser's, shining with the unconquerable faith that moves mountains.

Barny turned to look at Rackham. Then he stared straight ahead over the snow's dipping prow.

Make no mistake, he had expected to receive harsh treatment, maybe worse, at Calico Jack's hands in these days to follow. He had not forgotten that stabbing look across the council table, and he made sure Calico Jack had not forgotten, either.

But over the man in red, so soon as the island had dropped under the horizon, came a subtle

change. He was lighthearted, he was almost jovial. He walked the deck softly, smiling upon whoever met his gaze and upon the sea, now empty, now studded here and there with a blob of island or the long blackish arm of a cay awash. He jested with his helmsman. To his musicians, privileged to consort with him at table and upon the snow's poop, he pointed out landmarks as they passed.

"Providence," he would murmur, his scarlet arm indicating a lofty headland wreathed in mists upon the larboard bow. "Yonder lies Morgan's Bluff. The old devil would squat there, watching the Straits."

And the smooth voice would trail off in a chuckle like a cat's purr.

Quarters were cramped on the *Rose*. She was carrying thrice her normal complement, and her 'tween decks were filled with masked cannon in accordance with the plan to lure pirates to her by disguising her as a peaceable trader. Pretty near all hands slept on deck, and this was no hardship, for the weather held fair and the nights were mild.

Thus it came about that Barnaby, turned in under her low taffrail beside Jem, on the snow's third or fourth night at sea heard talk that was not meant for his ears.

Jem had fallen sound asleep, but Barny lay drowsing with the sweet night breeze cool on his

face, his eyes uplifted to the dipping stars. Perhaps he dropped off, for he had suddenly the sensation of waking with a start.

Low voices, quite near, stirred the blue-black silence round him.

He propped himself on an elbow to peer over Jem's body. In the upthrust glow of the binnacle, not a dozen paces away, he saw two faces suspended as in mid-air.

One was the helmsman's, for it swayed to and fro as the invisible body beneath it urged or eased the tiller — a man named Stiles, Barny saw, once of the *Fancy's* crew. The other face was square and red, with a long scar athwart the cheek; and its lower jaw ground slowly, tirelessly, like a cow's on her cud. Gabe Shattock.

"What I says," the quartermaster was growling, "ye can foller your own sweet will. All is, Cap'n Rackham bade me noise it round a mite and find out who's with us."

Barny was wide awake at that, but still as a corpse. Cap'n Rackham, forsooth! Was Shattock recruiting again?

Stiles spat into the leeward darkness. "Aye, but how's he aim to git his hooks on the stuff?" he asked.

"Will ye come in," challenged Gabe in a low, hard mutter, "if I tells ye?"

"So help me."

"Why then. Twelvemonth gone, we all but cotched it. Jack, he had word of the convoy from dispatches we took in a stinkin' packet bound to Barcelony — aye, down to the very names of the craft would be carryin' it and their day of sailin' from the main."

"No!"

"Yes, I tells ye. He laid his plans accordin'. But by a devil's twist o' luck comes a hurricane and hove us fast on Anguilla, and the convoy was took by others off Matanzas 'fore we could git off that bleedin' ledge and away."

"What became of the — you know?"

"Took into Providence, they say, and there the Spaniard bought it all back at a ransom would knock ye cold. Jack lost word of it, though we puts in a fortnight on the haven with our ears cocked. There was scuttlebutt rumors a-plenty — some said 'twas not ransomed by the Spaniard after all, but traded in for rum and arms and carried north to the colonies; some swore 'twas sunk in the Strait of Yucatan. Sour grapes! They all pined for it. But Jack, he set him down and figgered the thing right out. Mate, he's a head on his shoulders, Jack has."

"Figgered? Figgered what?" Stiles asked impatiently.

"Why, this. It ain't to the haven, as anybody could see. It ain't gone to Spain, for the popish

rats won't send it out of season, they're that scairt o' weather. Now where is it?"

"Get on."

"Why, on the Main! They've held it on the Main all this time, sendin' out rumors of sinkin's and takin's to make its passage, when time comes, the safer. Jack figgers they'll send it home" — his voice dropped — "in this year's convoy."

"Ah," says Stiles, impressed. "And what's his plan?"

"Huh! He sides in with the loony Frenchy, drawin' a long face and swearin' to live pious. For a bit we was scairt the whole lay would be keelhauled when that palaverin' fiddler loosed his tongue in council meetin'. But no, everything has went smooth, as I say. Jack, he buries his other pile — you ain't supposed to know he has one — and he sets Frenchy to guard it. He gits him this tight little vessel, a fine crowd of brisk hands, all the arms he can look at, and a free hand to forage. What more can he ask?"

"Ah, spit it out then. What'll he *do?*"

"Do? He'll stand out here into the Straits, ye booby! He'll lay low for that convoy, due now any time. He'll git his hands on them sweet pretty gewgaws worth fifty thousand pounds. He'll hide 'em somewheres against his time of need. *And* he'll sail him back to the lousy frog-eater — after takin' a ship or two for to have some-

thin' to show for his cruisin' — pull his pious face, and say nothin'. Ho, ho, ho, my bully!"

"Sounds so-so," Stiles approved cautiously. "But git on and tell me what manner of stuff be these — these pope's jewels ye speaks of. Worth a whack? Don't be fillin' me up with all this fifty-thousand-pound gossip."

"Hey!" Shattock's voice was like the rumble of distant thunder. "Talk respectful when ye talks o' that, Ned Stiles! First off, there's the cross, tall as a tall man, thick as my laig, solid gold and crusted — What's that!"

"What's what?" whined Stiles, jumping and peering behind him. "I ain't heard nothing. Somebody snorin', most like — the deck's full o' the off watch. Git on and tell me."

"Crusted with di'monds big as a thumb nail, and the whole device so blazin', 'tis said ye put your hand to it and 'tis hot at the touch!" Shattock's voice had dropped to a guttural whisper.

"'S life!" Stiles hissed.

"Ah, that ain't the half of it. There's a brace of crystal goblets big as punkins, and a stack of trenchers all solid, hammered gold. And then there's the altar cloth took fifty years in the makin' — blue brocade, she lays two fathom square and heavy with gold thread and jewels drawed into the lives of the saints, and all a-twinklin' like the stars of heaven. And bags and bags of loose

stones a man could roll in, and bags of dust, and bars of — *What's that!*"

For the second time a choking sound had escaped Barny. He was cold as a block of ice. The blood pounded at his throat, in his ears. With Shattock's words he had leaped back, over leagues of ocean and the flying days, to the chest that had no bottom, to a flight of steps leading, incredibly, downward into a ghostly, magnificent glow. . . .

For men did not fashion ornaments like that noble cross in pairs. And if Calico Jack Rackham thought to lie in wait in Florida Straits for the pope's jewels — oh, but he'd be waiting a long, long time!

"Split me, but you're jumpy to-night!" Stiles was complaining.

"Tell 'ee, I heard a body laffin'."

"Laffin' in his sleep, then. Keep your voice low and tell me this. What's the bargain on dividin' of this loot and that he left on the island? Equal shares all square and proper, or — "

"Ah, don't fret! Ye'll be richer'n any king ever strutted. Jack ain't *said* nothin'. But you mark this. Jack Rackham's square with his mates."

"My idea is, git it outen him in writin' — down in black and white."

The two voices sank to whispers, one still com-

plaining, the other gruffly protesting Rackham's shrewdness and integrity. Whispers and chuckles merged with the rustle of water, the lazy creak of rigging as the *Rose* swung onward through the night.

But Barny cared not for that. He had heard enough! Snugging up to Jem's warm body, he grinned amain at the winking stars and jubilantly wiggled his ears.

Forsooth and forsooth, what a jest was here! What a pother over nothing! Rackham plotting darkly, searching the Straits for those massive treasures which were safe and sound, and hid beyond —

Suddenly, a few more words of those two at the tiller broke the night's stillness.

"Ye say the fiddler suspicioned? He's in on it, then?"

"In on it? Nay, that he ain't! Hee, hee, hee! All's he'll be in on, once his fiddlin's done, is the fiddlin' end o' Jack's blade! Yon humpback, too. . . . 'Lost overboard, Cap'n Benoit. Too bad, too bad!' Tee, hee, hee!"

CHAPTER X

THE ROARING LAMB AND THE BLEATING LION

NEXT day at dawn, the snow's masthead man descried a sail. His cry came down out of the dusky sky, stirring the little ship into life. Half-dressed, Rackham ran up her main rigging with his object glass.

" One's as good as another," he muttered, after a long eager look, and in a moment he was down again, snapping orders — all his lackadaisical geniality fled, his black eyes fiercely alight.

The *Rose's* canvas was shortened to such as a prudent trader might employ, her course changed till she had the wind abeam and was pointed straight for her quarry. Her decks were cleared of all but a handful of men, the hatches clapped

shut on the rest; and lo! she was a sleepy merchantman, crawling sluggishly coastward under gray skies and over an oily sea.

But from beneath those innocent appearing hatches came up the muffled clink of small arms, the furtive squeak of trunnions, and the thud and punch of rammers shotting the guns.

After the disquieting talk he had heard between Shattock and Stiles, Barny had at length fallen into exhausted sleep. He slept through the lookout's hail, through the brisk movements that followed, and awoke at last to find the *Rose* pervaded by a tense and ominous quiet.

He struggled to his feet beside Jem. "What's — what's this, Jem?" he whispered, rubbing his eyes.

The hunchback made no reply. His face looked old and worn as he scowled off to leeward.

Barny followed his gaze. He saw three ships, a convoy, composed of a full-rigged vessel bearing a red cross upon her bellied purple foresail, and on either hand of her a smaller, rakish craft of about the bigness of the snow. Up out of the gloom of the southwest these three were forging very bravely, close-hauled on the starboard tack and sailing a course that, if all held as now headed, would throw the snow right under their marching bows.

"Jem, Jem!" Barny whispered again.

" What sort of ship is that? Do buccaneers wear — crosses? "

Rackham, standing by the tiller, heard him and flashed round a blanched and grinning face whose eyes had rolled to the whites. " Ye fool! " he cackled thickly. " Ye gullible ninny. The pair of you keep your teeth shut and look sharp to your music when I give the word, or ye'll be asking crack-brained questions at the gates of hell! " He whirled back to his helmsman. " Hold her there! " he warned.

The ships were nearing fast. You could hear the proud rush of water under the galleon's forefoot, see her consorts' guns. The snow looked tiny and feeble beside those three. Yet she came on apace.

There was a sudden movement on the galleon's deck, and a grave old gentleman, his weather-blackened face lean and white-bearded, mounted her bulwark and waved his arm, calling out some words in a foreign tongue. He seemed excited and anxious.

Rackham sprang on his own rail, swept off his plumed hat and bowed gallantly, smiling across the swiftly narrowing water and shaking his raven-black head — as if to imply ignorance of the other's language but entire good will to the speaker. But as he did this, all the while over his shoulder he was snarling at the helm, " Hold

her as she lays, ye flea-bit dog, hold her there or I'll spit ye . . ."

The ships were very near. A thick, expectant silence settled down over the sea.

Barnaby shuddered. He knew, now, how ill-timed had been his confident chuckles of the night before, how false had been Captain André's hopes. Rackham had not changed a whit. He was bent on piracy, of any sort possible. He had spread treason amongst the snow's crew. Against his will, and the wills of the hundred and fifty under him, stood only — Jem the hunchback, and himself the fiddler. And even Jem didn't know . . .

Barny stared at the three ships, and into his eyes crept a desperate courage. Of one thing he was sure: he would hold to the oath he had given Benoit — if it killed him.

Suddenly he crouched to spring.

That morning Don Roquis Rodriguez, commander of His Most Catholic Majesty's galleon *Santa Luisa,* had been content.

At the outset he had regarded this voyage with misgiving, and mentally berated his sovereign, whose political urgencies could not wait for the plate-ship convoy, due to sail in another fortnight, but must have a special craft from the Main and consigned to him alone. Don Roquis had cleared Vera Cruz, in fact, fearing the worst.

But the saints had been with him. The wind had held fair and of moderate vigor, as if by divine will restrained against distressing of his stout vessel, deep-freighted with dust and bar gold. Moreover, at the very entrance to the Straits which the valiant old grandee most dreaded, he had encountered these two friendly *guardas del costa* of Portugal, swift sailers and fiercely armed, which had generously offered to accompany him northeastward into open water.

So far, nothing untoward had occurred. The *Santa Luisa* had now been five days and six nights at sea. Her masthead watch had been warned to keep a sharp lookout for Settlement Point, the western extremity of the Great Bahama and the last landmark of the Straits. Before another nightfall Don Roquis looked to double the Point, part company with his courteous escort, and stand out across the wide Atlantic for Cadiz and his reward.

He had come up out of the great cabin, thinking these happy thoughts, to see a small ship, in tonnage and rig of the type the English call a "snow," converging upon his course from the eastward and already a half gunshot away.

Don Roquis was startled at first. The anxiety with which he had lived, this sennight past, had made him jumpy. But he soon saw there was small cause for alarm. Visibly the snow had no

gun ports, her deck was well-nigh deserted; by all appearances she was an innocent trader bound from the islands across to the Florida Plantations. True, she would pass close aboard him — so close that at first sight his suspicions had embraced the possibility of a careless hand at her helm and a collision. But that fear, too, seemed unfounded. He knew the English were at once lazy and daring: they scorned to change course if they had barely room to pass. Don Roquis saw that they had room here; the snow, he judged, would cross his bows with yards to spare.

Nevertheless he was not the man to take chances, with a king's fortune and many lives at stake. He signaled the guard ships, which lay slightly astern, to bear in closer, and a brief word to his sailing master put the ship in readiness to up helm and sheer off at instant need.

The snow came on. When she was within hailing distance, Don Roquis mounted his bulwark and addressed her courteously, asking that she show her colors and take care to keep clear. On her poop a tall, swarthy fellow in a gaudy cloak, who seemed to be her commander, replied only with smiles and a shaking of the head. Clearly the ignoramus meant no harm.

And then and there the strangest thing occurred. On the snow's poop beside the man in scarlet there were three others. One was the

helmsman, but he, scowling intently, never so much as turned his head. Another, a cripple with a stunted back, cowered by the taffrail, staring queerly. The third was a lad with a fiddle; and 'twas he drew Don Roquis' eye, 'twas his amazing act that turned this peaceful scene into mad turmoil.

As suddenly as if he'd seen a ghost, this stripling leaped to the snow's rail and commenced to brandish his instrument and cry out in a great voice. No sooner had he done so than yonder red cloak flew after him, dragged him backward to the deck, and felled him with a mighty blow of the fist! Whereat, if you please, the poor deformed one, coming to life with a howl to wake the dead, was across the poop in one bound and fastened catlike to the scarlet shoulders!

Mutiny! thinks Don Roquis, all his sympathy with the beleaguered officer. By word and gesture he bade his boatswain pipe to quarters and make a boat ready at the falls, in case the master of the snow should have need of assistance.

But when he had turned again, the brief skirmish was all but over. The captain had slipped neatly out of his garment, letting the cripple fall heavily to the deck. His rapier flashed, but seeing the open cabin hatch beside him, he appeared to change his mind. Pouncing on his assailants, he

dragged the pair of them to the hatch and kicked them below, then slammed and bolted the doors upon them.

As good as a play! Don Roquis chuckled appreciatively. He loved brisk work with all his heart. But an instant later the smile fled his grizzled face.

The snow at this moment, having held a true and steady course, was dead ahead of the galleon and crossing her path close aboard. In the next, as if by magic, six or eight gun ports had slapped open their black mouths along her larboard flank, and a sheet of red flame raked the unsuspecting galleon with a deadly broadside.

Like a stabbed horse the *Santa Luisa* reared upward, groaning at the impact of that murderous charge. With a rending crack her tall foremast buckled and crashed overside in a welter of canvas and gear. She recoiled, trembling, and began to settle by the head. Her bow had been all but blown right off her. In the mad confusion of that moment, cries of amazement, of terror, of mortal agony mingled and welled aloft to the sodden sky.

And Don Roquis? The shock had thrown him to the deck. But when he arose, his sword was out.

Instinctively his fiery gaze sought the two Portuguese, which might now prove his only sal-

vation. He saw the shameless, fleeing sterns of those fair-weather friends!

Bitterness swept down over that proud old man, but upon its heels a tragic valor. White-lipped, frowning sternly, he took stock of his predicament. And orders came rattling out of his throat like musketry.

The snow had passed on, jibed, and now lay hove to on his larboard beam, waiting complacently. Her narrow decks were now thronged with yelling, half-naked men of whose calling and temper Don Roquis had no longer any doubt. The gun ports of her starboard battery, opened also now, gaped at him threatening.

He descended to his main deck, slippery with blood and cluttered with bodies and wreckage. Under his supervision the wreck of the foremast was cleared away. A gang of men hurried forward to lash tarpaulins across the shattered stem. Small arms were served out to all who could stand; the others were carried below. Along the galleon's gun deck, covers were snatched off the waiting cannon, charges rammed home, sights taken, slow matches gripped in bloody but determined fingers.

And now Don Roquis returned to his poop. Taking the wheel, he eased his beloved *Santa Luisa* gently off the wind and crept down upon the snow. A noble serenity lay upon his leathery

cheeks. He had lost all to treachery — all but the boon of dying like a gentleman and a seaman.

This he craved.

At short range, his arm lifting in signal, the derelict beneath him spat defiance at that cowardly ragamuffin!

Rackham was furious. The abject flight of the two Portuguese *guardas* he had hoped for and counted upon: he knew their kidney of old. This abrupt and determined resistance on the part of the Spaniard was beyond all reason and reckoning.

As the *Rose* took the galleon's fire, he vowed then and there that, should this fat prize escape him, those two numbskull fainthearts — the humpback piper and the meddlesome Boston fiddler — who by their mad attack upon his person had apparently given the alarm, would meet death sooner, even, than he had planned.

He had called up his gun crews, for another volley would sink the Spaniard — and Rackham was by no means minded to sink her — yet. Since she would not strike her colors, there was nothing for it now but to out grappling irons, lay her aboard, and dispatch the job with fusils and dirks. This he prepared to do.

The galleon's broadside, through nervousness or faulty marksmanship, had effected small dam-

age. Scorning the big ship's opposition, the snow pinned down her tacks and came on, her decks ringing with savage cries.

After a few moments of suspense, with a grinding jar the two ships rubbed and lay together, stem to stern.

And once again was Calico Jack confounded. The galleon's main deck lay well above that of his own rakish craft. His boarders stood ready, armed to the teeth, as the ships touched. But before they could lay hold and scramble up over that lofty bulwark, ye saints above! — a host of screaming Spanish devils landed on their necks.

The best defence, Don Roquis had heard, is attack. He had put the theory to test. Small hope he entertained of victory; escape was unthinkable. But if he could embroil these infidel dogs until the *Santa Luisa* foundered, mayhap she would drag them with her. A life for a life! And if his precious cargo must be lost, far better for it to rest on the sea's bottom than fall into impious hands!

Men so disposed are not easily conquered.

There on the *Rose* snow stood a horde of desperadoes beset by a handful (for the galleon's casualties had been very heavy before they touched) — beset by a parcel of lisping popish heathen. But these Spaniards had looked death between the eyes. They would not down. They fought,

praying loudly. They fought with rapiers slim as adders' tongues that shed unseen death under the pirates' stumbling guards. They fought with halberds and with axes, with spars and belaying pins and bare fists. They fell, wounded, and rose again to fight on their bleeding knees.

And in the thickest corner, the first to leap, the quickest at thrust and riposte, shouting, invincible — an aged man! Nay, his blade was everywhere. His life seemed charmed. Lumley and two others rushed upon him a-roaring, and in the next breath he had stepped over them, two of the three choking on their hearts' blood, and gone beyond.

Doubt assailed the snow's men. They fought on, but without relish, muttering, covering as they could, pressed ever backward.

And Rackham saw what was betide; the fight turning against him, his prize settling fast. Rackham vaulted from the snow's poop and came flying, his face knotted with disappointment and black rage. Into the shouting, struggling throng he pushed — to confront that elderly leader with a quivering point of steel.

The grandee was tired, the swashbuckler fresh and goaded on by fury. Don Roquis was twice his opponent's age, and he had snapped off a finger's length of his sword point in the fray. But when the red cloak whirled on him like a bloody

cloud he had at him with all the zest imaginable, leaping, parrying, his white hair whipping gamely in the breeze.

Yet Rackham pressed him hard. Rackham's steel pierced his sleeve, whistled past his ear, thrice nicked the black velvet coat above the heart before the don's guard repelled it. Oh, Rackham was grinning now; he was confident, his rat's eyes were searching pitilessly for the final lunge.

And then, for the third time that day, the Castilian and a stern fate surprised him. From desperate defence Don Roquis fell in a breath to dazzling attack. His spare black figure lashed out into a forward-pointing line from blade to heel . . . Rackham roared, parried clumsily, stepped back — and tripping over a fallen body, tumbled sprawling on the deck.

Dazed, he glared up at the grandee's stained, blunt blade hovering at his throat.

" Quarter! " he begged in a strangled voice — " Quarter! An ye kill a defenceless man — "

His terror-stricken voice was interrupted by a great clattering and a volley of cries as his followers, seeing how the wind lay, hurled down their arms and echoed his plea for mercy.

Don Roquis Rodriguez frowned down upon that wretched flesh at his feet.

" Name of a Name! " he cried, his lips curling. " This gutter's whelp can pray for the mercy that

he would have been the last to grant!" He paused and looked about him. Then:

"Granted," he snapped, sheathing his broken blade, and his figure tautened to a sudden resolve. "My children," he called to his own panting, watchful men, "God has rewarded your valor. Herd me these infidels below and batten them fast. Clear decks, look to your hurts, transship our effects and cargo. Quick for your lives before the *Luisa* founders! This craft looks to be a stout one; we'll take her in payment of their perfidy. Ho for Spain!"

That night the *Rose* snow, flying the quartered arms of Castile and León, deep-freighted with prisoners, a jubilant handful of Spaniards, and very precious cargo, doubled Settlement Point and laid a course for the sunrise.

That night Don Roquis Rodriguez was again content.

CHAPTER XI

THROUGH WHICH GHOSTS MOVE SOFTLY

"JEM, old firkin," Barnaby groaned, "how is it with you?"

There was no answer. Barnaby turned on the planks of the snow's cabin and dazedly looked around him. His head ached; his body felt to be one big bruise. He remembered being hurled down the companion; how long he had lain unconscious he had no idea.

A little away from him on the floor, Jem lay like a lump, with an ugly bruise on his temple and a trickle of blood across his cheek. Above and around them, a mighty thunder of battle told him that out on deck Rackham had come to grips with his prey.

With the capture effected, Rackham would be

down here in a towering rage, thirsty for the blood of those two who had given the alarm. Before then, Barny reflected, he and Jem must either devise some means of defence or find a hiding place.

His eye sought weapons about the cabin, but he knew well that except by some chance he would not find them: whatever armament of the snow was not then in use would be below in her lazaret.

But his questing gaze found better than weapons — the inner cabin doors. That to starboard opened into Rackham's personal quarters and was not to be thought of. But the other, opposite, he remembered to have been left without occupant, for Shattock, Lumley, and Mendazo preferred to bunk in with the hands.

Why not hide in there?

He struggled to his feet and limped across the cabin. The door of the larboard inner room was unlocked; and he eased it inward and peered beyond.

A single port high in the after end let wan light into the place. There was a pair of berths against the outboard timbers. These and most other available space were filled with tools, spare bits of lumber, nail kegs, paint and tar pots, and all sorts of odd gear.

There was a bare possibility that Rackham, coming below upon the heels of his triumph, would

be too elated by victory and too engrossed with loot of the galleon to remember his prisoners. At the least, to hide in and barricade this room were better than idly waiting for death, or no telling what cruelty, in the main cabin.

To work then! In a few moments the lad had dragged his mate's limp body inside the room and lifted it into the lower berth. Then he turned his attention to the door. After locking and bolting it, he braced a pair of heavy joists against the panels so shrewdly that, though they could easily be lifted clear from inside, every effort from without to swing the door in would but bind it the tighter.

He stood back to survey his work with pride.

" Stand by t' repel boarderrs," chuckled a voice behind him, and Jem shook the cobwebs out of his head and rolled out on to the floor. An instant he stood grinning, swaying dizzily. " Whisht! What's to do, Barrny? "

" To do, you old ghost, you! " says Barny, his eye lighting with relief and joy. " Why, lumme, get us weapons and ammunition for to hold the fort! Jem, are ye hurt? "

" Divil a bit, Barrny. 'Tis yer own block is bleedin'. Here."

They sat them down and inspected their various bruises. No bones broken, and for a wonder with that headlong fall they'd taken. Each

bound up the other's hurts, using pieces of Jem's shirt for bandage; and when 'twas done they sat on the berth together, looking for all the world like a couple of gloomy Turks in turbans.

"Very likely 'twill be all up with us when Rackham comes down," whispered Barny. "Ah, Jem, I dragged you into this mess!"

"The divil ye did! I'd av jumped fur him anyways, the blackhearted traitor! Well, we'll be doin' what we can, Barrny — 'tis you and me forninst the push av them from here on. Ye said somethin' av arrms, now?"

"If we could but lay hold of a cutlass, at the least we'd be ready to die on our feet."

"M-m-m. Lave me think, now." Jem studied the floor to the right of the door, muttering absently. "Jemmy, old gurl, ye'd ought t'be knowin' this hooker. Whisht! Ain't that lazareet just below here somewheres? Say two paces abaft the door and harrd by the bulkhead — aye, begorry, that'll fetch her!" Now he was crouched at the spot, knocking softly for timbers. "Barrny," he flung over his shoulder, "them's tools, ain't they? Hand me a saw and a chisel. Quick now, they're easin' up on the fightin'; Rackham'll be down along soon."

They went at it together, working in snatches and pausing to listen. In a few minutes two plank-ends by the bulkhead had been severed and

lifted, and the gloomy lazaret, piled high with grim shapes and smelling of powder, yawned below.

Overhead silence had fallen.

"In ye go, boy," Jem whispered — "and pass up anythin' handy."

Barnaby wriggled into the hole and dropped to the lazaret floor. A pile of grenado shells was by his foot; he snatched at them and had handed up half a dozen before Jem stopped him. "Muskets, pistols, dirks, ye loony! There's no room to throw these squibs."

Muskets and pistols and dirks it was then. A plenty of everything lay waiting. He took them off the racks and reached them up to Jem's waiting hands. Shot, powder, priming caps followed; then a cutlass apiece, and a pair of wicked looking knives. Ye gods! thinks Barny, we'll have enough for a regi —

A sound stopped him. Feet clumping down the cabin companion steps! Jem hissed like a snake, and his big fist caught Barnaby's collar and hauled him up. The plank-ends slipped noiselessly over the hole. Cutlasses in hand — for there'd been no time to load and prime the muskets — they stood facing the barred door.

Through it came words, but not addressed to them and not roared out as they had expected in the voice of Jack Rackham. A curt but gentle

voice was issuing orders in some foreign tongue; and more footsteps rattled down the companion as if in obedience, to rest burdens of some heavy sort upon the cabin floor, and depart running, and return with more.

"'Tis Spanish!" Jem whispered, his blue eyes popping. "Ah, the sad day I wuz after hearin' that heathen tongue! Barrny, d'ye know what? Rackham and the ship's been took!"

"Praise God then! But where is he and the rest — killed, Jem?"

"Dunno. And don't be givin' thanks too soon. 'Tis carrgo we hears bein' stowed on cabin floor. Belike the galleon was hurted bad in the fightin'. Mister Spaniard, he's movin' aboard, bad cess to him! And now he'll take the snow instead. And you and me, Barrny, be stowaways fur sunny Spain!"

"I'd liefer be that than a dirty pirate," says Barny stoutly. "As for me, I like the looks of yon cap'n with the white beard. Jem, an we slipped out and told him all — "

"Whisht! Ye poor bogtrotter! Ain't old Jem told ye what the murtherous Inquisition will be after doin' to a man? Make yerself known to the Spaniard, and yer life ain't worth the flick av me eyelash. 'Twouldn't be in his power to save ye, boy. No, no. Lay here we must, and hope fur luck."

Again they stood listening, hardly daring to breathe. After what seemed hours the hurried movements of men in the cabin ceased, the last pair of feet climbed to the deck above, and shouted orders, heavy tramplings, and the creak of cordage told those two below that the *Rose* was getting under way.

"But Jem, Jem!" Barny groaned, "what'll Cap'n Benoit say? Oh, if he had but listened to me!"

"Listened to ye? What mean ye by that, Barrny?"

Barnaby told him of his own suspicions, and of that talk with their leader.

"I believe ye," was Jem's sage comment. "'Tis the wan fault av the man to have too great faith in his fellows. But chirk up, Barrny. We'll be seein' him yet wance more, mebbe, who knows? And at the worst, we did the best we could. Lave us git a peep outside."

Working cautiously, they rolled a barrel under the stern port and climbing on it peered out. A gun shot astern of the snow's white wake, the galleon rolled helplessly, only her castled poop clear.

"No one aboard," Barnaby observed.

"Divil a wan. Rackham and the rest be goners, then. Good riddance, and God save their black souls, says I. Ha, there she goes!"

Even as he spoke, the pitiful mass of wreck-

age gave a tipsy lurch and rolled slowly under the waves.

So much of the horizon as they could see now lay stark empty. They turned from the dismal prospect to stare into each other's eyes.

"Spain's a terrible long ways," Barny murmured dolefully. "I'd give a leg to be back yonder with Cap'n Benoit on the island."

Jem thumped his shoulder with rough friendliness. "Arragh, lad! Bain't we a pair? Chirk up, I tell ye — "

Again their talk was rudely cut off, and their hearts missed a beat as they heard steps descending the companion so near them. This time the steps were slow and careful, and they were accompanied by a melodious rattle of dishware and a delicious aroma that seeped through the door panels into their nostrils.

"Jem, old puncheon!"

"Whisht, sur! 'Tis Mister Spaniard's dinner."

Neither had eaten since the night before. They stood frozen by a thought. The tray was set down, the footsteps blundered up the way they had come. Silence in the cabin . . .

"Sure he wouldn't notice — "

"Quick, then, 'fore he comes down to ut!"

Under their trembling fingers the key squeaked, the joists were moved aside, the door swung in.

But at the sight that met their eyes they stopped aghast.

"C-cargo!" Barny choked, half blinded.

"Ssst! So here's what the black-eyed divil wuz after! Saints defend us!"

Over a battlement waist high they goggled at a room of gold. Bars of it, laid end to end round the bulkheads and ranged up in courses like so many bricks. And on top, a crown of fat bags thrown carelessly, spilling here and there fine threads of glittering dust.

'Twas Jem came first to his senses. "Good glory and all!" he breathed, "but a body can't eat that!" And scrambling pell-mell over the barrier, he made for the smoking tray on the center table.

"The whole or nothing!" Barny shot after him. "Quick, Jem!"

And the whole or nothing it was. Lifting the tray, Jem passed it over the threshold and was back inside, with the door shut and braced against that winking heaped treasure, before you could take three breaths.

The two of them fell a-giggling.

Loud voices rose outside, soon after — the curt and courtly voice in anger, another voice in shocked protest. But Jem and Barnaby recklessly paid those voices little heed. Barnaby had his strong young teeth in a drumstick, still warm

and succulent; Jem was making inroads in a fine big pudding. And by time the *Rose's* new commander sat him down to a second meal, brought tremblingly by a pale and penitent steward, his two guests on the other side of the larboard cabin door were placidly asleep.

When Barnaby awoke, 'twas dark as a pocket in the tool shop. Some inner sense had roused him, but so fuddled with sleep was he that minutes passed before he could fix himself in his surroundings.

The ship creaked with a hundred tiny peepings; past his ear the water rushed in rhythmic surges, and he felt the long easy rise and dip of open seaway; overhead, slow heavy feet paced the snow's poop in tireless promenade. . . .

But there had been another noise, nearer, below; and this had called him. He was sure of it.

It came again, a rustling, a vague sense of movement — not in the room — not in the cabin adjoining — but somehow very close. Rats, had been his first thought; but the bodies making that noise were heavy. Now and again he could have sworn he heard a stealthy shuffle as of men's boots. A clink — a muffled thud — a whispered oath —

The lazaret!

With one hand Barnaby shook Jem's shoulder, clapping the other over his mouth to safeguard quiet. He let Jem listen for a bit, till by a prod

he was made sure that his mate had heard those noises and guessed what was toward.

Then the two of them groped out of the bed place and dropping to hands and knees crept through the blackness till their fingers met the rough ends of the floor boards they had cut.

Neither spoke a word. They moved like men in a trance; in each heart the same hideous fear was rising, making speech futile. Very gingerly their fingernails prized the board-ends an inch or two, just enough to let them peer beneath.

Both had surmised what they would see, but when they actually saw it their hearts jumped — and all but stood still.

A battle lantern, held aloft in a hairy fist by the door, cast ghostly patterns of glimmer and shadow over the crowded room. It showed down-bent heads, naked shoulders, moving arms — a file of human bodies passing arms and ammunition from hand to hand and out the door as swiftly, as tenderly, as if each man and each piece passed were substanceless. From the stooping bodies low words arose.

" Somebody's been here afore us, Jack."

" Didn't I tell you to call me Cap'n Rackham hereafter? Aye, the lousy Spaniard's been ferreting. A plenty for all, though."

Barny set his lips close to Jem's right ear.

" Jem," he breathed, barely letting the word form, " ghosts, aren't they? — or be we dreaming? "

" Ah, wirra, wirra! Barrny, there's bloody murther afoot the night! "

" Where — how'd they get here? "

" Must have been took prisoner, clapped under hatches in her main hold. The Spaniard had no time to look about and find and bar the 'tween deck passage aft. But Rackham knowed av ut."

" Jem, what a chance! Leave us crack at 'em, Jemmy. Sure we be more friends with the Spaniard than with those trait'rous ruffians. Look, I can lay my hand on the pistols where I lie."

" Don't be thinkin' av ut, ye blitherin' idiot! An we make ourselves known, we're carrion in a blink. Lave 'em go. I have a better scheme. When that they breaks out the hatch and starts a-fightin', all hands'll be after swarmin' there. Then you and me'll slip above, all unbeknownst in the darkness, and we'll cast loose the dinghy hangs to her davits astern. How's that, Barrny? Ssst! There's the last av 'em."

Indeed, the dark job below there was done. Like ghosts as they had come, the figures were melting away, and the man with the lantern closed the door softly behind him.

" What now? " says Barny in a louder undertone.

" Whisht, we must wait, Barrny lad."

So they waited. Minutes passed, and nothing happened. They had removed the joists from the door for quicker egress, and squatted behind it close together, ready at the first sound of alarm to fling it wide and tumble out.

There was something ghastly about this waiting. The hair on their necks crept. Their ears ached with listening; but all they heard was their own thunderous heartbeats.

"Jem, I tell you we were dreaming. There's no sense to this inaction. They'd strike quick if at all."

"Bide still yet a while, Barrny. It'll be comin' soon now."

Perhaps they nodded. . . . At any rate, suddenly the stern port, which had been but a square of lesser darkness, lay bright; and they were blinking and rubbing their eyes in the vague gray of dawn.

"Oh, Jem, 'tis too late! Here's morning. They'll see us."

"Now, now, lad. Patience. We can do no —"

A faint cry from far above made both of them jump to their feet. By the sound they recognized the masthead hail. Quick stirring of feet on the poop followed.

"A passing ship! Now's our chance, Jem!"

"Sure, boy! What a whack av luck! We'll

be givin' 'em a signal as they goes by. To the porrt, quick, Barrny!"

Up they scrambled, eagerly looked out.

To their surprise the sighted vessel was already full in their view. A brig she was, a stout brig under towering canvas, coming on like the vengeance and overhauling them fast. All white and splendid in the rays of the rising sun, she was a thing of loveliness and hope.

And at sight of her Barny Vane went white with incredulous joy. "Jem, Jem, Jem!" he cried out. "That ship — "

"Not so loud, ye loony! Will ye be havin' the Spaniard at our throats? Where's that neckerchief?" He was fumbling in his doublet. "I must try and cotch their eye with — "

"But Jem! Listen — "

"Now pest on this screechin'! Will ye be sp'ilin' our chances? Wait now — "

"Be still and hear me!" Barny was half crazed. His eyes bulged out of his white face; he clutched the hunchback and shook him with savage strength. "Listen! Have you not seen that figurehead before?"

At that, Jem paused. "Uh — " Turning from Barny, his look narrowed as he studied the lines of that oncoming hull. "Seen . . . her? — *Holy Mother!* Ye think — ?"

"Think! Think! I know!" Barny was

trembling so he could hardly speak. "God knows how she came here. But she's the *Fancy,* out of Boston!"

No sooner had he gasped out the words than off the brig's bow there sprang a delicate white plume, and the peace of dawn was shattered by the roar of a long gun.

Whereupon, as if only waiting for that as signal, the attack from within that they had so long expected burst upon the *Rose* snow. There came the crash of splitting wood from forward — on deck a sudden stampede of many feet — a cry — a shot —

CHAPTER XII

THE COMING OF THE CROSS

Now for a fact were Barnaby Vane and Jem O'Neil as helpless as bound men flung into tidal cross rips.

The escape from the main hold of Rackham and the snow's crew they had foreseen; but they could not throw in their lot with either side of the desperate fight that followed, for to them discovery by, and the victory of, either side spelled disaster to Benoit's cause and their own deaths. The appearance of the brig *Fancy,* that selfsame vessel on which young Barny had been so scurvily trapanned by his employer, and her attack on the Spanish-manned snow were equally and utterly incomprehensible to them. Moreover, the *Fancy,* running swiftly alongside after her first

shot and grappling the snow's larboard bulwark, cut off the faint hope they had entertained of loosing a boat and getting away unnoticed in the confusion of Rackham's sally.

'Twas broad daylight now. The two ships, unhelmed, had yawed about till they pointed west, and a golden shaft of sunlight flooded through the single port of the storeroom and slanted along the littered floor. In this stood Jem and Barny, with all that brave armament they had snatched from the lazaret about them, and gaped dumbstruck at the fearful sounds that dinned upon their ears.

A fury of noises, stunning the brain. A tidal wave of uproar, in which they could only now and then distinguish any human sound — a grunted curse, a death yell, the crunch of steel biting flesh and bone, the swift thunder of pursuing steps, a musket shot stifled by clothes . . .

They flinched, they sucked in sharp breaths at each terror. And each impact sent whirls of golden dust motes down through the sunlight that bathed them. They thought, then, of the great treasure heaped in the cabin adjoining, for which three parties must now be fighting.

And all at once Barnaby, hardly knowing what he did, caught up a cutlass and made to open the door. "Way, there! I'm going to aid that Spaniard! 'Tis he who's twice beset! I feel it

— I know it! I care not whether his precious Inquisition boils me — "

"Nay, Barrny." Jem's eyes of Celtic blue were pitying, but with both fists he held the door joists firm. "Ye'll do nothin' av the sorrt, indeed."

"But our oath, Jem! To — help the stricken and oppressed — !" The lad was sobbing deliriously. His world was crashing round him; the light that had led him forward ever since the meeting with Benoit — that one light was flickering out. "Surely — surely, 'twere better to perish — helping the right — "

"Ah, wirra, but there's no right here to help, Barrny mate. 'Tis two wrongs at each other's throats the day. An we rush into yonder shambles, we be dead by nightfall, and the wan wrong or t'other conquers. But look 'ee! Say we bide here quiet. Why then, mayhap we'll be the means av bringin' the wrong to justice."

"You think so?"

"Divil doubt ut."

"Well — so be it, then." The boy's shoulders drooped. "What will we do?"

"Why, feed us."

"Eat! With men dying — ?"

But the hunchback would not be deterred. He held that with food here before them 'twere foolish not to stay themselves against whatever the future

would bring. Pulling the tray out from under the berth, he squatted beside it and made Barny sit down too. There was bread left, and part of the fowl and pudding. The food stuck in their throats, but they downed it.

That done, Jem pulled out his fife and warmed its stops with his breath. Barnaby's fiddle had been dropped on deck at the very start of the misfortunate struggle with Rackham, and was now doubtless either long since flung overboard or kicked into a thousand splinters. Neither spoke of the matter — simply, Jem had out his pipe and struck up a tune.

A blithe Irish jig he played, soft as a lark in early morning — albeit there was small need of restraint amid the monstrous racket still pounding at their ears. The gay thread of melody gave young Barny heart again. The sunlight was gone from the floor. It was hot in the storeroom, and fumes of burnt powder and the salty smell of warm blood hung heavy in the air. But through it all this little pattern of song came drifting from the hunched brown figure and his pipe, there on the floor; and Barny clung to it, seeing green fields and generous trees, and tall clean spars and swelling clouds — aye, clung to it as a drowning man to his oar, and found some measure of content.

By and by the uproar lessened. The sound of

firing grew scattered, died; footsteps moved no longer in hard-running spurts but slowly, wearily. Jem wiped the mouthpiece on his sleeve and put his pipe away. He and Barny sat, staring at, without seeing, each other, listening to sodden quiet above.

Abruptly this was broken by cheering, which rose and flapped like a banner, and trailed off into gleeful rags of sound.

"That'll be Rackham and his pack, worrse luck!" Jem sighed. "The Spaniard wuz too few to be yellin' so loud. Well, may God rest his popish bones!"

New noises. Shouted orders, the swash of water and the rustle of swabs on deck. Pounding hammers. The splash of limp weights hurled into the sea.

Barny's dry lips moved over something like a prayer: "He must go back to the island, he must go back."

"Who, Rackham? Ah, boy — I wish he would! But why should he?"

"Because —" He checked, mindful of his promise to Benoit. Surely there could be no harm in telling loyal Jem of what lay hidden on the island. Yet there was his word. "Because Cap'n André said he would," he ended doggedly.

Jem sighed. "And did the cap'n say we'd go back with him?" he asked with bitter irony.

Then at a sound his face changed. "Ssst! Here they come! Git ready, Barrny."

Overhead, the cabin doors had banged open, and two heavy men descended the stairs.

"Rackham and Shattock. It's us they're after."

Jem and Barny stood rigid behind that barred door. But they soon saw there was small need of caution. Those two men who had entered the cabin adjoining had no thought of them, or of anyone or anything save what lay heaped before their gluttonous eyes. Their gasp of delight could be heard in the storeroom.

You could all but see them, standing there at the foot of the companion, feasting their eyes on the sight of gold. At last the air stirred with their low laughter, and one of them spoke.

"Morgan! Kidd! Dampier!" — 'twas Rackham, his voice all unsteady with emotion — "all ye who have lusted after plunder, hear me! With this, and what I left at — at a certain place, I'll be a king!"

"M-m-m. And that ain't the whole story, neither!"

That was not Gabe Shattock! 'Twas a brassy, nasal voice spoke those chuckling words — a new voice, yet a voice disturbingly familiar. At sound of it Barny stiffened; in him it had instantly recalled the picture of a sawed-off stump of a man

with twisting lips, and small shifty eyes, and a fist like a maul . . .

"Not the whole?" Rackham was saying doubtfully. "Now what do ye mean by that, pray?"

The other man coughed. "Will ye play square with me if I tells ye, Cap'n?"

"Aye, there's my fist on't." Rackham's voice had gone low and swift with eagerness.

"Wa-all, look a-here then. I dunno what ye got hid, but as fur this here pile — why, the *Fancy,* that is — ahem! — in a manner of speakin' . . ." The rasping voice thinned out into silence.

"Come, speak up, man!" cried Rackham hoarsely. "We be sworn mates from now out, you and me. What's this about the *Fancy?*"

In the pause, Jem bent close to Barnaby. "Whisht! Who's this other, now, this *Fancy* swabber?"

"'Tis Matt Rowse, Jem. No doubt of it, worse luck. He was mate of her, don't you remember? And Cap'n André sent him back to Boston in command?"

"Ha, that's who! 'Tis the voice bothered me. But what the divil and all is he doin' hereabout?"

Barny shook his head bewilderedly. "I'm no nearer knowing that than you, Jem old tub. I never trusted the man. Now, seemingly, they be two of a —"

" Wa-all, so be it, then! " Matt's voice blurted suddenly. " There's this about the *Fancy*. She has stuff aboard makes this lot look like barnyard litter! "

There was a low, sibilant whistle like a snake's hiss. " So! " says Rackham in his oiliest tone. " Now what manner of stuff, sweet blade? "

Rowse began speaking slowly, evenly, as if he were telling off a list upon his fingers. " H-m-m. Four score and six ingots, gold. Five armchests o' coin, mostly pistoles and cruzadas. Two smaller chests, doubloons and onzas. Ten bags, each a hundred weight, loose stones. Three armchests, stones strung and set in brooches."

He paused. You could hear lips smack. " Burn me! Is that all? " Rackham breathed.

" Did I say so? Leave me think. Aye, that's the whole — but fur the big lot," Rowse added.

" The big lot! Well, well! "

" Uh-huh. There's a two fathom rag o' blue brocade and a stack o' plate and a brace o' pitchers, and a cross — "

" *What!*" Rackham's cry rang like a pistol shot.

" The big lot, I says. Bulk stuff, no good — 'twill have to be broke up afore ye can — "

" Broil my eyes and liver! Rowse, my dainty dairymaid! Rowse, my pretty nosegay! Split me! ' The big lot,' says he. Ho, man, but 'twas

a lucky day when you and me were born! 'The big lot!' Rowse, my nanny, d'ye know what ye've got your hooks into?"

"Ain't I just said?" Matt Rowse was dully mazed, a shade peevish at being made game of.

"The pope's jewels!" Rackham spat at him with a shriek of laughter. "Took a year ago, ransomed once, lost again — but now, by Moses, found! The pope's jewels, clodpoll! For the which, his excellency the governor of Vera Cruz will be made to pay fifty thousand pounds through the nose!"

"Eh? Wa-all! H-m-m!" Rowse puffed like a turkey gobbler. "So that's it, huh? Play square with me now, Cap'n. Divide with me, and I'll divide with you. Lumme, fifty thousand — "

"High-ty tigh-ty! Ha, Rowse, but I love thee! I love thee like a long-lost brother! Good old numbskull! Dear old rockpate! 'The big lot,' quoth 'ee! Come, pick up thy heels, my merry angel! Ha, ha! Ho, ho . . . Dee-dum . . . dee-dee . . ."

The cabin floor shook to clumsy caperings. Into the stricken silence of the store room came the racket of two voices, merging incoherently in a devilish glee.

CHAPTER XIII

A ROGUE AND HIS MEMORY

"STILL, I reckon we'd ought to be mighty thankful he's forgot us," mused Barnaby that night.

The *Rose* was under way again, and, by the cant of the floor and the buffetings of pitch and roll, under press of canvas.

"Not too thankful yet awhile," Jem's voice warned him from the darkness. "Mind ye, Barrny, what a deal the rogue's had to fill up his dirty head with, since he booted you and Jem below. 'Tis no bit av chance he's had to think av us. Give the blackguard a breathin' spell, and it'll come to him, begorry!"

"And what'll we do then, Jem, old schemer?"

"Whisht! Watch us, Barrny. Minute he

lays hand to that door, down we drop into her lazaret, closin' av them boards behind us which he'll never be findin'. Down along into her main hold, boy, where there be a dozen av nooks and crannies fur the hidin' us. Sure, we'd be gone afore this, but thinks I 'twere best to bide here so long as he laves us be. We've heard much, tucked away here. And we might hear more, who knows?"

"Gad, but you've got a head on you, Jem! Where think you he's bound now, in all this haste?"

"Wan thing's sure," Jem chuckled. "'Tain't Spain! Mayhap 'tis Vera Cruz, after the ransom he sez the Spaniard'll be after payin' — though 'tis more likely a flayin' alive they'll give him an they cotches him, thinks I."

Small comfort here for Barnaby, to whom Vera Cruz looked as remote and barbarous as its parent country across the sea.

"Still and all, we're not dead yet," he sighed.

"Dead is ut? Bedad, but you and me will make 'em step afore they drops *us* overside. Look, though. Here's a matter I don't fathom — two matters. What'll Rackham be meanin' when that he sez there's plunder hid?"

Barny caught his lip betwixt his teeth. Would Captain Benoit hold him to that promise if he could know all these desperate circumstances that

had intervened? Hardly. And yet — there was the word passed.

A tiny voice rose up in the boy's perplexed heart and bade him tell. No possible harm — and a chance of gain. Still —

"What, gone asleep there?"

"Nay, Jem. Hark 'ee, trouble is, I went my oath to the cap'n never to breathe a word — "

"Then don't! Nay, I'll hear no worrd av ut. What's bechune man and man is locked up and the key throwed overboard. 'Tis no matter, at all."

By and by, "What's the other matter bothers you, Jem?" Barnaby asked.

"Whisht! This cross now."

For it seemed Jem had heard tell of the cross and its splendid accessories, long before. Cap'n Benoit, he said, knew Spanish as well as many other tongues, and back in those grisly months of slavery above Porto Bello on the Main, Benoit had overheard their keepers gossiping of these prodigious jewels . . . "Whilst we dragged our chains along the road and their whips fell like sarpints to our bleedin' backs," said Jem.

Indeed, the fame of the cross — though supposedly a secret matter between Spain and the Vatican — had spread the whole length of the Spanish dominions, and crept northward and eastward through the islands from Tortugas to

Port au Spain. The loss of those holy vessels, Jem argued, might well send a nation to war.

"And ye may marrk my words!" he concluded. "There'll be admirals and tall squadrons hot after them golden beauties and the big cross. And what gives me the blitherin' shivers is this: Will ye be tellin' me how Rowse, the bogtrottin' clodhopper, who a fortnight past wuz bound fur Boston, gits him down to the Main instead, and snags them giddy riches off the Spaniard, *and* meets up with the *Rose* wance more, here on the high seas? Yah! 'Tis black magic."

Here was a thing that Barny could tell. "The cross wasn't on the Main, Jem. It had been stole long before, ransomed once, and seemingly captured again. At any rate, 'twas in Boston — I saw it there." And he told him how and why, and of that talk he'd overheard between Shattock and Stiles.

"Boston! How could ut be way up norrth there?"

"That old villain Hornigold might likely have traded it off the pirates, for arms and rum, through Bellamy or some other of his shipmasters. You know how eager the rascals are for goods of that sort, and you heard Rowse say the stuff was no use to him — 'twould have to be broke up and all. Aye, that's how Old Nick got the stuff."

"Ah, but how's Rowse come in? How'd he hear av ut, and how'd he ever git his dumbunny fingers on ut? And, wance stole, how comes he down along here and meets us just in time?"

"Well, we must have been in the track of ocean vessels — and he was on his way back. As for how he got it, 'tis too much for me. He did, and he's here. Mayhap he'll tell Rackham. Meantime, let's get some sleep. I'm hungry, and sleeping I don't think of it."

Rowse did tell Rackham — but not for four long days, and when at last the information Jem and Barny sought appeared, 'twas well-nigh lost in far more pressing matters.

After Rackham and his new partner had danced with glee over the Spanish gold in the snow's cabin, they had departed, as if to inspect and in turn gloat over the fabulous treasure stowed away in the *Fancy*. From this conference only Rackham had returned. The two had apparently come to some agreement, for the ships were loosed as night fell, and quickly put under canvas.

They steered the same course and held close together, as if each commander was fearful of losing the other. The *Rose* led, and day after day, when Jem and Barny would clamber to their lookout on the barrel top, they could spy the *Fancy* holding her position as steadily as if she

were in tow, a stone's throw off the snow's port quarter.

As for the direction, they could but guess at it. 'Twas partly westward, for the trades bore them steadily without wearing ship or trimming yards, and by craning out the port they could get a peep of the rising sun at dawn. And this bore out Jem's notion that they would be heading into the Straits again, and through the Gulf of Florida for Vera Cruz and ransom.

No sail or land was visible, albeit those two unsuspected prisoners in the storeroom kept sharp watch, with always a faint hope of escape. The nights dragged past in pitch blackness, the days followed them, though feebly lighted by the single window, as slowly. The cabin adjoining their hiding place remained bolted from above; Rackham must have moved his hammock forward, for no man descended the companion into the room of gold. Onward and onward they sailed, seemingly with every stitch of canvas drawing, and as endlessly as if their course crossed that wide ocean which, they judged, should lie dead astern.

And through the days and through the nights, one fear lived with Jem and Barnaby: that Rackham would remember them, and catch them unawares and break in before they could escape. It gripped them by the throat, asleep, and snapped them up staring wildly, the sweat cold on their

shaking bodies. It urged them to load and prime every piece in their armament, to look to their defences of the door, to spend long hours listening above, listening below, till their ears ached with weariness.

Upon the morning of the fourth day, the last crumb of dry bread was cleaned off Don Roquis' tray. And though Jem made a brave show of tipping the bottle of white wine that had slaked their thirst in meager swallows, and smacking his lips thereafter, Barnaby knew the bottle was stark empty.

At sundown of the same day, the *Rose* came to anchor.

The move had been made without warning, without shortening of sail such as would have indicated that the ship was feeling her way up a channel into harbor. Simply, they felt her swerve and come sharply up till her foresail took aback, and after a moment or two of stillness the cable rattled through her hawse pipe and she lay still in the quick-falling dusk.

A view from the port told them nothing. No land, only the wide and darkening sea, and a sprinkle of stars peeping out of the blue heavens. Even the brig had gone from sight — though sounds told them she was anchored and furling her canvas hard by. Lowering a boat too, they thought.

They waited, faint with hunger, vastly troubled by they knew not what fresh hazard. Cautiously, in the strange silence of the ship's immobility, they whispered together.

"Wh-what's this, Jemmy?"

"Dunno, lad. Bide still a bit till we see . . ."

Their hushed voices ceased altogether as the bolts of the cabin companion were sharply drawn and the footsteps they knew — and had dreaded — descended. They could almost believe themselves moved back four days — save that now there was no pause, no gasp of admiring wonder and delight. Chairs scraped, a lantern was lit casting chinks of light into the dark storeroom. Papers rustled. Then:

"Here we be," says Rackham, very low. They could visage him smiling blandly, but his cold eyes stabbing that new partner over the table.

Rowse chuckled. "Even as planned, Cap'n. I knowed I wouldn't lose ye on the way, an' I suspicioned ye'd take good care not to be losin' me. Now what?"

"Why, what we said. 'Tis too soon to be effecting the ransom; we must wait till the storm blows over. Moreover, I have other plans. But first we'll do what we said."

"Below ground?"

"Where else? 'Tis a handsome spot."

"Aye, she looks favorable. To-night, then?

H-m-m. But — other plans, ye say? What of them?"

"Why, hark 'ee sirrah, there's this arrant Frenchy thinks he owns the earth. We must play in with him again. We'll paint out your vessel's name, make her a jackass brig with a hoist-and-lower mains'l beneath her tops, and we'll sail into his pretty haven all pious and sereno."

Hearing that, Barny gave a great dig at Jem's ribs. "There'll be our chance to escape!" he whispered.

"So be we ain't dead with hunger first," came back grimly.

Rowse was speaking again. "Ye think there's still more to be got?"

"More? Certes there's more! There's always more in this merry world for brisk lads who keep their eyes peeled. We must stand by a while, anyhow. Why not put in our time to best advantage? One thing, I want the *Dragon* back — had my bellyful of this pinch-withered hoy."

"M-m-m. But how about me, Cap'n? Ain't yon Frenchy goin' to spot me fur Matt Rowse, mate of the *Fancy,* and smell a rat?"

"Spot ye? Abaft that beard ye've growed since comin' on the account? Bah, Rowse! As for your hands, why the most of them are new aboard, as ye say, and the rest will mingle with the gang and keep beyond his notice."

" Aye, so far good. What's yer scheme, now, once we gits in there with him? "

" Ah, now ye've reached the kernel, old worm! Mark me. We'll hand back the snow to him for boot-topping. What next? ' Why, Cap'n,' we'll say, ' why not a raid on New Providence itself? ' we'll say. For the fool's sworn death to pirates, see? — So the plan will please him. ' There's a plenty of the bloody rogues there, Cap'n,' we'll say. ' And stores to keep the whole band of us dry and warm and fed through the rains,' we'll say. ' Ho, for Providence! Cesspool of these naughty scalawags,' we'll tell him, pulling long faces."

" Rackham, ye're daft! " came the other's growl. " 'S life! d'ye dream fur a moment three ships could take that — "

" Belay, turnip! " 'Twas a sudden shout of anger. Rackham, those two listeners in the storeroom felt, rated not over highly this doughty colleague. " Call me Cap'n Rackham and mind your manners! Said I we'd go to Providence, or that we'd *say* we'd go? Close your teeth on that and let a longer head speak."

Silence.

" So," Rackham continued in a milder tone — " so there's what we'll tell him. And we'll leave him to careen the snow and boot-top her to his fancy, whilst we — with a brace of stout fresh

ships well armed, mind — whilst we stand out again to sea."

"Where?"

Rackham's voice fell low in disdainful amazement. "Rowse, can you ask it? Why, for the Straits — and the plate-ship convoy which, as I learned from the Spaniard, has not yet sailed from Vera Cruz."

"M-m-m. Mebbe, though, that Frenchy'll be minded to come along. What then?"

"We must do our prettiest to prevent — tell him time presses as we've heard that numbers of the buccaneers have left Providence haven to seek the Spanish treasure (the very mission we'll be on our own selves), making haste imperative if we are to cotch the rendezvous unaware. I'll go my sainted oath he'll choose to bide and clean the *Rose,* for she is very foul as he knows, and follow us later — in which case," Rackham finished off with a sneer, "mayhap he'll sail her boldly into Providence and find himself in a fine big pickle; and lo! we'll be rid of him forever."

Rowse coughed. "And should he be obdurate?"

"Will nothing satisfy that pigeon's heart of thine? Should he be obdurate, certes, we must put on smiling looks and bide with him a while. At the most, cleaning this craft will take a sennight or less. Then we'll put forth all together.

And you and me will give him the slip in the night. The rest will befall as I said."

After a pause, during which Jem and Barny could well imagine that turncoat merchantman, chin on fist and scowling, hunting for flaws in Rackham's various plans, Rowse seemed satisfied. He grunted, and the papers they had heard before were rustled briskly.

"So be it," says Rackham. "Now set your fist to these articles so I'll have proof to give him of your pious conversion; and take 'em back aboard with you and get all hands to sign as well. Ah, no need to read the stuff; 'tis the daftest nonsense ever writ. There! Now —"

"Cap'n," Rowse cut in, "now that's done, here be another matter. Speakin' of men. Ye say there's five score odd aboard here, and I got six and thirty more. Cap'n, that's a main big parcel."

"Well?"

"Cap'n, old Matt Rowse, he risked his skin fur that pretty plunder. Half and half, we says, you and me — all fair and proper. But hark 'ee, here's this lout Shattock thinks — and Mendazo and Lumley too — Cap'n, that pile won't go no great ways amongst a hundred and fifty souls. Have ye got a scheme fur that?"

There was so long a silence that those two in the darkness thought Calico Jack meant not to

answer. But at long length they heard a little licking sound.

"Aye, Rowse, I have a plan. But ye must leave it to me. You'll get yours," he lent these words peculiar emphasis, "and don't worry."

"Wa-all . . ."

"Come now. Let's speak of other things. Nay, don't press me. I said what I said, and Calico Jack's a man of his word, if need be. Look, bully. I've had no time as yet to hear the tale of how ye came by these delicate baubles. I could have sworn they'd be on the Main, after the ransom was paid. And yet ye say the *Fancy* hailed from Boston. Don't tell me — "

"Ha!" Rowse's voice, lately so low and servile, swelled heroically. "And there *is* a tale, by Moses! Matt tricked 'em, sir, that's how."

In the dark storeroom Barnaby whispered, "Now they're coming to it! Now we'll hear the truth of it!"

"Sure, sure — hist then."

Rackham was enjoying himself. "I'll warrant ye did, ye fat porpoise! But how?"

"Why, I sailed her into Boston, and there was old Hornigold, her owner, with a bleedin' roomful of loot hid up under his very wharf! Aye, open yer eyes, Rack — Cap'n Rackham, sir! Him a pillar of the church and the most respectable merchant in all of Massachusetts Bay!

Why, lumme, he'd been sendin' his ships down here and traffickin' with the buccaneers — tradin' guns and rum fur Spanish gold — year upon year! And there it lay, just as the letter said, under the big chest in his inner room. First night in we found it, after the old devil went home and abed, and afore sun-up we had it snug aboard and were standin' off the coast again. For, thinks I, this is no place fur treasure — hee! hee! 'Tis not safe hereabouts, says I. We'll be off with it to the Indies, where such things rightly belongs, says I, and we'll stow it safe down there among the cays where we kin lay our hands to it when wanted, to make soft and easy our last days. So I lays a course fur Hispaniola. And five days out, who should we overhaul but this here snow with Spanish colors a-flyin'! Now there's mischief, says I; the Spaniard don't build snows, he's too scairt of a narrer beam; he must have length and breadth beneath him. There's an English ship been took by popish heathen, says I, and likely there's prisoners aboard and mebbe somethin' heavy and shinin', says I. 'Twere flyin' in the face of luck not to look into this. So we plumps a round shot acrost her bows, and — "

" Belay. I know the rest. One trifle yet baffles me. How came ye to know the stuff lay there, under the wharf? ' Just as the letter said,' says you. What letter? "

In the storeroom Barny had clapped a fist to his mouth to shut in his gasp of horror.

"Why, the letter Black Robin was takin' home with him. I seen him get it, and I had it offen him afore nightfall of the day we parted. 'Twas all down in writin', I tell ye, and all's a man had — "

"Hold, gabbler!" Rackham's voice had gone hard and cold as steel. "Do you mean to sit there and tell me there was a body aboard the *Fancy,* or the *Rose,* or my *Dragon,* who knew of that plunder?"

"Why — why — " Rowse floundered as doubts and vague memories flooded back upon him. "S'help me, but there must have been, Cap'n. I never gave the matter any thought — but there was, there must have been."

"Who wrote that letter?"

"Eh? Ah, now, leave me think. I have it! 'Twas addressed to Cooper Vane from his boy Barn — "

A chair crashed. A fist hit the table top a blow that shook the ship. And upon these two sounds there followed a terrible snarling laugh of remembrance, and understanding, and demoniac rage.

"*Aha!* Did I call thee dolt, then? Rowse, Rowse, thou'rt a dagger of wit, a fount of wisdom beside this muggy self! How could I — how could I have forgot?"

A door latch rattled. "Locked! I thought so! Lively now! Fetch me yon broadax cleated to the hatch above. Call all hands! Send me down a pair of men to move this stuff off the doors. Bid Shattock search the ship from trucks to keelson, from stem to tiller chains — every cranny big enough to hide a roach! Begone!"

With his first words, in the black storeroom so near had come a scuttling as of rats in panic — a small scraping as of planks lifted — rubbing of bodies against wood in some constricted space — and much hard breathing.

"Make haste there!" Rackham was bawling. "Come, men, away with ingots and bags — clear a space! Ha, the ax! There's traitors aboard, I tell ye! 'Tis them we can thank — out with 'em! We'll see who can hop on the rail and defy us! Side in with the dirty Spaniard, will they? Get us thrown under lock and bar, will they? Now, then. Stand clear!"

The first splintering smash cleft the panel through, letting wan light into the larboard cabin.

Barnaby was stooped over the hole into the lazaret. He was panting with exertion, urging, imploring. The head and shoulders of Jem protruded from that hole; his poor gnarled back was caught fast.

Crash! . . . "Ha!" . . . *Crash!*

"Oh, Jem, can't ye — now, breathe out whilst I —"

"Ugh! 'Tis no bit av use, Barrny. 'Tis a square peg in a round hole I am, and — Haul me clear. There. Now the pistols, quick! We'll be seein' him afore he sees us. When the door goes, fire!"

Crash! . . . Crash! . . . CRASH!

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT TROVE

Now the upper hinge burst, and the stout door jumped away from the jamb on that side, letting through the gap and its riven panels long jags of light into the storeroom.

"But Jem!" Barny cried, "what do we gain by his death? The whole ship will fall on us — and Rowse — and —"

"Ah, but what else, ye poor loony?" A pistol in each fist, the hunchback crouched, grimly waiting. "At the least we take him with us!"

Crash! . . . Crash!

"But Jem! — the port! — 'tis bigger — there must be land near!"

Slowly Jem turned his head to stare at that open window.

"Aye," he breathed, a shade regretfully. "Sure, we might make it, Barrny."

"Quick, then! Up with you!"

"Up yerself, lad! I'll —"

"Faugh! Must we go through all that again?" Barny stooped, got a shoulder under the twisted body, and shoved upward. "Must I not ram ye through first, old keg, if we are to — there! How now?"

"Ugh! A bit more, now. Ugh!"

With the last exclamation Jem's legs suddenly slithered outward and over the sill, and a loud splash below told he had hit the water.

On deck came instant alarm, and a shot. Barnaby vaulted from the barrel to the sill and thrust head and shoulders through.

CRASH!

The door was down at last, the storeroom filled with light. Turning his head for a last instant, Barnaby saw the figure of Rackham plunge over the threshold, his arms wide and groping in what to him was inky darkness. What a mark he would have made!

The boy looked no more. Raising his body on his strong young wrists, he shot forward and out into the shadows — down for a whirling moment — and smack! into the cool silence of the sea.

He swam for a space under water, then bobbed up to find Jem beside him. From the lighted

hull of the *Rose* came shouts, red tongues of flame as muskets spat; and all round them shot hissed and plopped.

"Jem! Are you hit? Can you manage, Jem?"

Jem grunted, swimming strongly on his crooked back to keep his face out of water. The firing weakened. There were sounds as of lowering a boat; twice they heard Rackham's voice upraised in screams of anger; but already the two anchored ships were well behind them, and in the night's black blanket they knew they were safe.

"Belay there." Barny stopped to tread water and peer about him. "Where we bound, old scow?"

Puffing like a porpoise, Jem stopped too. Then they both saw a black shore line floating in the lesser blackness straight ahead of them.

"Land ho, Barrny!"

"Ha! Thought I smelled it near. Can we make it?"

"Divil doubt that. Beat ye there, mate!"

They gained the beach together, and stood grinning weakly and peering round them. Half starved they were. Shivering cold. Marooned on what remote scrap of earth they knew not, and under the desperate necessity of avoiding the only humans near.

Yet they stretched grateful arms toward the

distant stars, glowing with relief to be out of that ship. Oh, 'twas good to be free!

Stripping off their clothes, they wrung them out as best they could and hung them on bushes in the soft Carib breeze. They took stock of what they had salvaged — a pair of dirks, a flint and steel and tinder box that Jem kept always by him in an oiled packet, a handful of soaked slow matches, and one of those homemade grenado shells which the hunchback had earlier slipped into his doublet and forgotten. These and Jem's pipe comprised their earthly goods. They set them by with care beside a boulder and commenced to jog up and down along the sand to keep warm.

"'Tis an island, seemingly."

"Sure, by the looks. We must bide till mornin' afore we can be explorin' fur food. I'm thinkin' 'twere wisdom to be hidin' us in the woods somewheres and gettin' us a wink av sleep."

So they dragged on their clumsy garments again, and climbing the narrow shale above the beach, parted creepers and undergrowth and on hands and knees pressed a few yards into the thick jungle that appeared to cover this sea-blown spot.

The ground was dry and soft with sandy loam and leaf mold; the rank foliage cut off the wind. They lay close together, burrowing comfortably into the spicy earth. All was dark about them,

save only a crevice in the trees overhead through which they caught the occasional small glint of a star. The sea washed with unbroken rhythm on the curving beach; the wind rustled dryly in the palms above them. Gradually their shivering subsided, and the suspense and horrors of the last few days slipped far away. Exhausted, they fell asleep.

And Barny dreamed a vague, eerie dream of those raffish knaves through whose fingers he and Jem had slipped. He felt the red arc of treachery that was Rackham hovering over him. He heard Matt Rowse grunting like a hog. Above all, for some reason, he sensed the brutal presence of Gabe Shattock, the sleepy cunning in that man's puff-blown eyes. In his dream, 'twas Gabe's voice kept recurring.

" What's the bargain? says you. Lay off that, Ned Stiles. Equal lays all right and proper, o' course, and ye'll be richer 'n any king what ever strutted. 'S life, no — Jack ain't *said* nothin'. Nor he don't need to. Ye can tie to this: he'll be square with his mates as have fought and bled fur him — or *I'll know the reason why!* "

The poor lad awoke in a cold sweat, with the terror of the nightmare heavy upon him. Then recalling where he was, he crept the closer to Jem's sturdy warm hulk and breathed deep with relief.

The moon had risen; its silvery sheen filtered

down through the rustling branches and spotted his clothes and Jem's with slivers of light. Hark!

Barny listened intently. The murmurous night seemed, in fact, to be stirred at intervals by the faintest tremor of a sound. It might be the ghosts of oars on tholepins — but more likely 'twas the mutter of surf on some distant shore.

Whilst he was still lazily wondering, it seemed, suddenly Jem was stirring, and a shaft of level sunlight was slanting through the bush into Barny's sticky eyes. Daylight!

"What ho, Jem! Arrrgh! Man, but I be famished!"

The hunchback chuckled. "Me likewise, Barrny. What say we forage?"

Avoiding the shore on which they had landed, they struck deeper into the bush and presently emerged on another shore, cut off by a point of land from the view of those aboard the *Rose* and the *Fancy*.

Here they fell upon a nest of turtles' eggs, which they set about roasting in the sand. Meantime, too, Barnaby had found a kind of citrous fruit, unknown to them and puckery, but sound and ripe. With these and the eggs they broke their long fast, waxing merry over that lonely meal.

"Belike there's wild pigs about," says Jem, through a full mouth.

"And crabs and fish, if we could snare 'em."

"Aye, lad, nor we won't be starvin' yet awhile. But how soon will they be comin' in fur to cotch us?" Jem's eyes sought the point of land and scanned the vacant blue sea.

"Soon enough, I reckon." Barny's face fell sober; but then again it lighted up, and he wiggled those gamesome ears. "Ah, but we have a whole jungle to hide in, now! Jem, old crock, methinks we be the very first marooners ever pined and prayed to stay marooned!"

After the meal Barny climbed a tall coco palm to spy out the lay of their new continent. From its plumed upper branches he discovered that they were, indeed, on an island — a sizable blob of thickly wooded terrain, narrowing to the point at this end but broader and rising to a knoll of some eminence on the other. In the latter direction, through the heavy verdure, he thought he caught the glint of still water, but with the sun in his eyes he could not be sure.

On the wide circle of ocean no sail was visible but the snow and the brig, shrunk now to peapod size, which still lay at anchor (though they had little or no shelter on that bold coast) near the shore to his left and around the shoulder of land behind which he and Jem had retreated. Men were astir on the brig, seemingly busied with overhauling spars and rigging. Aye, he thought,

they'd be disguising her under the jackass rig as Rackham had suggested before returning to Benoit's island and proceeding further with their designs.

Barnaby had a swift vision of the brave, smiling leader who was fated now to be the victim of their knavery, and he sighed bitterly under the weight of what he knew but could not prevent befalling. If only — if only he might have Cap'n André's ear for three minutes before they reached him! A hopeless wish!

He slid to the ground to report. Jem listened attentively.

" Whisht, there's luck, Barrny. 'Tis fresh water we need the worrst av all. Do you sneak round the point and kape yer eye fast to the divils, whilst I discovers that there spring."

" Right, Jemmy. Bring back a pig for dinner, eh? "

The hunchback was already moving off down the white beach. He turned to answer. " A dozen, an they're about. Look, Barrny. Strike through to t'other shore wheres ye can see the vessels. Mind ye stay hid, now. Whilst ye're there, set them slow matches and the old grenado in the sun to be a-dryin'. And I'll meet ye here by the fire " — he pointed up at the sun, already topping the forest — " by noon."

So soon as the bowed figure had dodged into

the bush, Barny's spirits fell. This place had a menacing aspect.

He shook off the mood and fell a-whistling defiantly. Plunging into the bush, he crossed the point again and presently was pushing aside the tangled growth of aloes and mimosas above the opposite shore. At his feet stood the boulder beside which Jem had laid their meager store of explosives. And beyond, scarcely a dozen rods from the whispering rows of little green breakers, rode the snow and the *Fancy* in full view.

Barny could sniff the fresh paint, see the big fore'n 'aft canvas being roved to the *Fancy's* main, hear the mutter of voices, the slap of brush and the tunk of maul.

His gaze came back to the beach just below him, and at once he saw the footprints. Not his own and Jem's. These new marks crowded thick round a knifelike crease in the sand to his left, the certain shape of a boat's keel; and they led thence, trampling and churning the sand into the look of a cow mire, away from him and round the point.

So Rackham had been ashore. What a mercy he had not fallen on them as they slept! And the faint sound of the night had indeed been that of oars, and the dream — Gabe's words . . .

That trail was irresistible. Had not Rackham and Rowse spoken of burying plunder? Surely, 'twere well for him to find the spot if he could.

Already the boy was retracing his steps to the opposite shore. Breaking out on the beach by the fire, he ran for the point. As he gained it, his heart was thumping prodigiously. Stooping low among the massive piled rocks that marked the end of the island, to avoid the chance of being seen — sure enough, with a cry of delight he picked up the trail at this end.

But lost it forthwith! The army of footprints led straight to the tumbled heap of boulders, and there disappeared as if an earthquake had yawned and closed on them.

Scratching his head and frowning at this mystery, the lad hunkered down upon the last of the footprints and let his eye rove in a slow, patient circle. Then he saw — and grinned.

Right alongside him, a flat slab of limestone led inward under the welter of ledges. A sprinkling of sand lay upon its surface, as tramping boots and naked toes had left it there. The trail ran on, over the slab, round a jutting cornice, under an immense uprooted tree — and down into damp, salty darkness . . .

Crouched at the entrance, breathing short and quick, Barny peered this way and that into softly dripping gloom. The cave was very large, and faintly lighted by sunlight piercing crannies in its rocky roof. It was crammed with plunder.

But young Barny had looked on studded chests

and bulging bags, on winking ingots and hills of gold, twice before this. What he chiefly stared at lay at his very feet.

The great papal cross was tipped carelessly against the wall. Near it lay the sparkling chalices, the nest of thick gold platters, the altar cloth rolled up and triced with marlin like so much calico. And 'twas these noble jewels, on which he had gaped, a callow bumpkin, from Old Nick's secret stairway, that gave him pause and made him think.

Thrown in anyhow with all this stupendous loot, the cross had a weary and degraded look.

Barny had been schooled to hatred and fear of the papacy. That intolerant doctrine he'd taken with a pinch of salt. Deacons and pastors didn't know everything. . . The boy had small inkling of that furious religious warfare, splitting off and reuniting sects and schisms, that uproar over words and rites and creeds, that for centuries had stained the world with bloodshed and broken hearts in thousands. Zooks, no! Priest or pastor, cramped cold meetinghouse or glittering chancel, papist or heretic, mumbled Latin or lusty separatist hymn — 'twas all one to Barny. A brave heart was a brave heart. The Spaniard had been brave, Captain Benoit was brave. Was either the less courageous because he worshipped thus and so? Bah!

God, too, was God. And this mighty cross and the rest, by whomever made and to whomever destined, belonged by right to God. Not to any pope, any man. To the God of Spain, and of Rome, and of France, and of Boston Town.

Was it not a burning shame that His property should be stowed in here by foul and blood-stained hands, stuffed in here with filched coins and silks and laces against the time when all alike could be snatched out and ransomed? By the one God of men, it was!

Thus that boy reasoned; and having come to this conclusion, set to work.

In less than a glass thereafter he had dragged the cross (its weight was all but beyond him, its precious stones cut cruelly his hands) and borne the other holy objects deep, deep into the woods; he had scooped for them a new hiding place and covered them well with loam and fallen leaves. With his dirk he cut a cross in the bark of a palmetto over the spot, then returned to the cave entrance to efface all signs of his presence there.

He bethought him now with lighter heart, but with a sudden sense of guilt at his negligence, of the two ships he had agreed to watch. Keeping under cover of the shore brush, he moved cautiously round the point to get them again in view.

They were gone!

Was it possible? With a cry of dismay he ran

boldly down the beach, along it to the keel mark where the trail started. Shore, strand, and blue sea lay empty and deserted.

Then another thought threw his gaze skyward. In an instant, startled anew by the height of the sun, he was racing back to the meeting place where they had built the fire. If Rackham had come ashore whilst he was in the cave, and chanced upon Jem . . .

No! One look up the beach showed him his mate at that moment returning, on the dead run.

Jem's clothes were torn; his blue eyes were starting from his head; but he was grinning as he drew up and clutched Barny by the shoulder.

"Whisht, sur! Where think ye we be standin'?"

"Standing?" Barny gaped at him. "Why, you old lump, we're standing here!"

"Arragh, lump yerself! But where's here?"

At a look in the hunchback's eager face, Barny checked the impudent sally that had risen to his lips. "Well, where is here, Jem?" he asked soberly.

"Cap'n André's island!"

CHAPTER XV

A TRAP IS SPRUNG

WITHOUT another word, they started on the run.

But Barny could not keep his own news in. "That's why — that's why — that's why — "

Jem stopped to let his mate overhaul him. "What's why?"

"That's why the loot bulked so big! He'd stowed it in the old place with the first lot, and I never thought — Jem, wait till you hear!"

Jem was staring strangely. "Is it daft ye're gone? Old place — first lot? Where've ye been and what have ye seen since we parted?"

But Barny tugged at his arm, laughing hysterically. "Not now, old demijohn — no time —

Quick! Must reach the cap'n before Rackham — "

" Aye, begorry! "

They plunged on.

The island seemed endless. They lost all sense of direction and floundered blindly through the dense jungle. Great furry leaves, thickets and matted creepers hid the way. A flock of pigs fled squealing before them. The jungle shoved them back like a living hostile force, then opened grudgingly to their crashing passage, then closed in silence behind them.

All at once the air trembled at the thudding concussion of a ship's gun. They stopped as if hit, shaking with weakness, glaring at each other through bewildered eyes.

" Did ye hear that? "

" Aye. Did you? "

" What might ut be, Barrny? "

" Rackham, surely. Jem, he'd left the anchorage before you returned. Can he be — attacking? "

" Whoosh! On with ye! "

And they were away again.

The land rose, they were climbing now. Gray rocks jutted out of the earth, the trees thinned and shrank to wind-twisted scrub growth. Here flickered a blue scrap of sea, far below; there swam a wide patch of white-hot sky. On — up — on,

their boots ringing and scuffing, every breath a pain, every muscle quivering —

Till, with stunning abruptness, they emerged into free air. As if a curtain had been flicked aside, overhead the bowl of heaven hung unbroken; the island and its deep-cleaving lagoon lay spread at their feet.

At the sight both groaned with bitter disappointment.

They stood at the peak of that rocky promontory which guarded the south flank of the channel. Past their legs were slowly moving — so close, so close they could have leaped into the shrouds — the spars of the *Rose* snow; and hard on her heels crept the disguised brig. They could have felled Rackham, red-cloaked at the snow's tiller, with a rock; indeed, they shrank back lest he see them. But his eyes, all eyes aboard those two vessels, were ahead.

Across the channel on the low sand spit, the saluting gun crew had cleaned their smoking carronade and were running abreast the incoming ships toward the beach, cheering and tossing their caps.

Anchored opposite the settlement lay the tall ship *Flying Dragon,* brave in new paint and ready for sea. But it was clear that Benoit had busied himself elsewhere. A landing basin, with wharfs and warehouses, had been built in the beach, and

beginning at each arm of the slip thus formed, a stockade completely encircled the buildings. The thatched roofs of the sheds were almost hidden by it; but in the center of the enclosure rose a large new edifice of rough-hewn logs which dominated the hamlet. On a flagstaff set at its hither end, the white banner of the Free State ruffled bravely in the sea breeze.

Wharfs and beach were black with moving men, and their cheers floated up to the watchers on the headland as if in irony of their defeat. Cables rattled sharply. The two ships came to rest. Faint orders could be heard, and the thumping of boats lowered off the falls.

Barny turned a tragic face upon the hunchback.

"Well, Jemmy," he managed in a choked voice, "it seems — we be too late."

"Aye, wirra! 'Twould be all av an hour afore we could skirt the cove and reach the place. By then the divil's p'ison'll be a-workin'. Bad cess to me fur losin' the way!"

"But why? But what if it is? Is it not our word against his? Won't Cap'n André believe us? He must — he must — you've been shipmates with him, Jem. Surely he'll trust you. I have reason to know he once suspicioned Rackham. And look! We can jump — swim across to yonder spit — run in on top of him!"

Barnaby had already kicked off his shoes. Jem's eye was alight with hope. "Why not? 'Tis our only chance." He was following suit. "So be the drop won't be killin' us."

"We're tough killing, old pannikin," Barny muttered, and stood up clad only in his breeches and a shirt rent from collar to waist. "'Tis not much higher than was the snow's stern port, and we know there's depth to float a ship below there."

By the time Jem stood ready beside him, black boatloads of men off the two ships had disappeared within the basin, and the crowd on the wharfs had also moved out of sight. Over the stockade, heads could be glimpsed crowding into the big main building.

"They're all bound indoors for a council," says Barny. "That's where we'll head for." Something tightened in his throat. "I'm first this time, Jem. You watch sharp, and if I don't seem to be — well, making it, don't you take any chances of Cap'n André going unwarned: you run round t'other way. One of us must reach him."

That gaunt rock seemed higher than very heaven; the black shadowed water at its base more awesome than the shades of a Puritan hell. Barnaby drew in a great breath, clenched his fists, shut his eyes — leaped —

And in an instant he was struggling up through clinging depths, indubitably alive; his head and

shoulders shot out again into fresh air. He shook the water out of his eyes and looked aloft to shout encouragement to Jem.

"'Tis easy, man! Just —"

No Jem there!

"Jem! Jem!" he gasped — and heard a chuckling laugh behind him. On his back, Jem's round face was lifted clear of the water as he shoved strongly away.

"Lumme!" Barny panted, overhauling him. "Didn't I tell you — ?"

"Sure ye did!" The blue eyes twinkled. "But 'twas main lonesome up yonder. And I figgered the old camel-back could manage, Barrny."

No more was said. Before they were halfway across the narrow channel, the menacing black fin of a shark came sliding in from seaward to cut them off. Jem saw it first.

"Push on there," he called. "I'll be stoppin' to git my wind like." And before Barny knew what was toward he had reached for the dirk at his belt, flopped over, and disappeared from view.

Wondering, Barny held up to tread water and look round him. Then, off to his right, he saw the knifelike fin go under. There was a wild disturbance just beneath the surface; the water bubbled and stirred, and a shining black tail thrashed the air like a scimitar. Then it was over, and

Jem's grinning brown face was beside him, pushing on.

"Gad, Jem, where did you learn to do that? I thought 'twas all up —"

"Sure, I seen that beggar from the cliff. He'd follered the ships in fur as he dared. 'Tis a trick a Barbadan gossoon was after showin' me. Save yer wind, lad, and lave us be makin' knots afore that divil twists the cap'n round his finger."

They gained the beach and started on the run.

But their soaked clothes hampered them. They had not eaten since early morning. They had urged their jaded bodies the length of the island through well nigh impenetrable jungle. 'Tis no wonder, then, that their pace should slacken, their legs falter and their feet trip over nothing; or that, when at last they reached the stockade, they should stop short, panting out of tortured lungs, and own themselves unable to scale it.

More precious minutes were lost whilst they skirted the palings to the water's edge, waded under the wharf, and laboriously clambered up the landing basin. Weakly they clung to each other, every step a mighty effort. Withal, their eyes shone with kindling triumph, and hope rose high in their loyal, desperate hearts.

The clearing was still and deserted, bathed in afternoon sunlight. From the open doorway of the main building issued the buzz of voices. A

guard dozed on a bench by the threshold, his cutlass across his knees. He started up as they approached, and stared as if they had dropped out of heaven. They pushed past him without a word.

" — And here they be now! " an oily voice was saying as they entered.

To their eyes, dazed by the pitiless glare of sun on water and white sand, the long room was filled with shadows and a curious murmuring. Two drenched and tattered scarecrows, they peered purblindly here and there, while in the silence that had fallen the water dripped off their rags to the packed dirt floor with a little snickering sound.

They descried a broad table standing against the wall to their left. At its head sat their captain, and on either hand of him the men they knew — Rackham sleek in his red cloak, his chin on his fist as he twisted the black mustachio and glowered upon them; and Salter and Shattock and Matt Rowse and Mendazo, and all the rest. The big room was filled up with squatting figures and staring eyes.

Jem and Barny shrank back. They had not thought 'twould be like this. There was an air of accusation in that room.

" Cap'n! " Barny gulped, fighting against this intangible hostility. " Cap'n, ye must know — "

" And here they come," Rackham purred again.

" Just as I said they would. Cowards once, cowards for all time."

Then those two in the doorway looked into their leader's face and saw it stern as granite.

" How now, you two? " he said in a low, hard voice. " Is it true that you both did mutiny and attempt to desert the ship, and thus the State, in time of battle? "

Ah, but there was the bitterest blow a fiendish ingenuity could have devised for them! Outwardly, aye in strictest truth, 'twas true. And yet — and yet —

" Ye foul-hearted liarr! " Jem sobbed, shaking his fist under Rackham's nose.

" Sh, Jem! " There was no conviction to be wrought that way. Barnaby's white, drawn face twitched in agony. He threw an arm about his mate's bowed shoulders and confronted Benoit. " Cap'n, if you will but leave me explain — "

" Yes or no. Did you? "

Barny gazed deep into the somber gray eyes, and saw no help there. The room swam slowly round and round him. He hung his head, his jaw clenched hard.

" We did desert — Lieutenant Rackham," he said, very low.

And that was too much for hot-heated Jem O'Neil. His father had fallen at the siege of Londonderry for a cause unjustly accused. He

knew not the tenth part of what all this was about. But he knew what he wanted. Denied speech, he spied a better course and took it with joy in his simple Irish heart.

In the blink of an eye he had leaped the table and was at Rackham's throat.

So great the surprise of that mad act, for a space the whole assembly lay helpless. Rackham had no time to draw; glancing up, he was struck by a hairy brown ball of bone and muscle that bore him backward with a crash to the floor.

Never over-brave at such a pass, the man screamed like a trapped rabbit. But his cry was stilled as the hunchback's fingers closed on his gullet. The two rolled under the table and out into the room, their bodies locked, a shapeless brown and scarlet mass that whirled and crashed and grunted like some strange great beast gone mad.

All this befell so swiftly, too, 'twas over before many sensed the end. A tall black shadow was round the table, it had bent and gripped and hauled amain. And then, to the wonder of every eye, the captain's lithe strength had peeled the two apart, and he stood braced, supporting each in a fist of steel while his eyes shot lightning at the hunchback.

"*Nom d'un chien!* Art mad to add this atop of all? Ho, Salter! Irons for this unlicked

whelp that snaps at its superiors. There, that'll cool thy spleen, young savage. Lieutenant, I regret this — unpardonable, sir — believe me — "

The long room was now seething with excitement. Guarded by Salter, Jem stood where Benoit had left him, panting and with bent head scowling at Rackham like a gorilla robbed of its prey. As for Rackham, he was quickly himself again; he touched his throat with solicitous fingers, he twirled his mustachios, he adjusted his cloak with a swagger.

" 'Tis nothing," he panted, with a black sneer at the hunchback, and he and Benoit returned to their seats. Benoit tapped his cane on the table for order.

" There is but one course for us, then," said he, in an even tone, as if the episode had not occurred. " Our articles are clear upon desertion and insubordination, and both laws have been offended. Salter, take these two in charge. Clothe them and give them food, but place them in strict confinement till we can bring them to fair trial and make disposition of this shameful affair."

He turned to Rackham calmly, the incident closed.

" For the present, other matters are more pressing. You were saying, Lieutenant? "

A grim fist closed on Barny's shoulder. He could not believe his eyes and ears. Prisoners,

and they had sought only to save Benoit and the State from treachery!

As he was urged toward the door he flung off the hand and whirled round toward the table with his outraged soul ablaze in his eyes.

"Cap'n, I demand the right to speak! You will repent —"

"Silence!" Benoit thundered. "You have lost that right by your own admission! Away with them, Salter."

In the last moment before he turned, then, crushed by this ghastly injustice, Barnaby met Rackham's eye. The man in red had bent his face away from Benoit beyond him. Under his dirty, jeweled hand he accorded the prisoners a fell and glittering smile.

And so, through the hot gust of rage that fell upon him, young Barny saw why no attempt had been made to catch the "deserters." This trap, too, had been planned.

CHAPTER XVI

PREPARATIONS FOR DEFENCE

THROUGHOUT the first day of Jem's and Barny's imprisonment, there was a great stillness. The sun rose, peered in one tiny window of the hut, climbed out of sight, glared in the opposite tiny window, and dropped behind the jungle across the lagoon. Birds called faintly in the forest, as if upon a remote other world. Outside the barred door of the hut their guard snored, and woke with a little grunt, and snored again. . . . Within, in the darkest corner Jem hunched on the dirt floor, his eyes gleaming balefully through the matted hair on his forehead, his long arms locked round his knees where his chin rested — crouched there, and would not eat, and would not speak a word.

Throughout the second day there was a great bustle and stir. Shouted commands. Creak of straining tackle. Running feet, feet tramping slow and patient under burden. The grunt of oars, and men singing. Taut ropes whipping the water, and the measured click-clack of a windlass coming home.

Barnaby listened to these sounds as a condemned man listens to the building of the gallows that will hang him.

"Sir," he begged their jailer when the man brought in food that day — "sir, for the love of mercy! — tell the captain I must speak to him! A matter of the greatest moment — he cannot know how great — how disastrous — "

The man gazed at him out of dull and as if uncomprehending eyes. In his shadowy corner Jem laughed harshly.

Upon the third day there was at first silence, then a thrilling hum of voices rising to a wave of wild huzzahs, then the boom of a gun. Barnaby paced the floor of the hut — four steps, turn, four steps, turn. His body had become somebody else's body, a thing of wood and stiffening clay of which only the head remained alive — the head in which a slow fire reddened under the breath of thoughts, glowing, creeping, eating. When the jailer entered, the boy fell upon him with a hoarse outcry.

" Tell him — if he leaves the man go — follows him — 'tis ruin — death! Oh, sir, bring him here or take me to him! "

Roughly the man shook him off. Leisurely he deposited the bowls of soup and biscuit on the floor. Straightening, he set his hands on his hips and his head on one side as he studied the prisoner. Then he said " Um " and turning, nimbly shut and locked the door. Clearly he had judged his two charges demented.

Upon the fourth day, in the morning, the door swung open to let a long bar of yellow sunlight along the hut's floor. For a moment nothing happened. Then a tall straight shadow lay patterned on the light.

" Jem? Barny? " said a voice they knew.

" Ah, Cap'n — too late! Too late! Ye'll rue the day — believe me, I could have — " Flesh would stand no more; the lad's words were choked off, and he flung himself on the ground, sobbing his young heart out.

" 'Tis never too late, *mes enfants*, for old friends to speak of the truth," said Benoit softly. He turned to shut the door and came into the hut. And at that, with a low cry Jem crawled out of his corner. His staring face was very pitiful. On his knees he came, mumbling, and fell in a lump at the captain's feet.

Outside, the sun climbed slowly over the hut.

An hour passed, an hour and a half — two hours. When at last the door opened, it was near noon.

The three came forth together and paced slowly, still talking, up the path toward the landing basin and the council hall. Benoit was between the two prisoners; he had a hand on each of their shoulders; he looked down, smiling gravely and compassionately, at first one and then the other of the pale and haggard, yet radiant faces upturned to him.

"I divined something was amiss," the tall man in black was saying, "before ever you broke in upon us. The lookout" — he pointed to the rocky headland across the channel — "reported the arrival of the ships at the other end of the island and their lying at anchor the whole of a day whilst they appeared to be quietly overhauling. This did not jibe with Rackham's tale of a fight off the point, your desertion, and the conversion of that bearded scamp he calls 'Harriot,' whom you tell me is none other than Matthew Rowse. Whatever the truth was, I knew he was lying, and I had perforce to think quickly."

"And we believed you thought us deserters!"

"Nay, Barny, one look at you was enough. Deserters are craven. Cowards don't stand up to two hundred man, with fire in their eyes, and give the lie to their accusers, and set upon the leader of them with bare hands."

"Then why — why — "

"Why did I dissemble, appear to fall in with Rackham against you? Because I saw I must protect you both from his wrath. A minute more, and he would have done in old Jem here, and in the next he would have turned on you — his fist was on his knife as I intervened. In you both I saw a chance to get at the truth. For that reason — had there been no other — I could not stand by and see you slain. No other sort of intervention would have appeased him."

Put thus, that dreadful memory of the council hall began to wear new clothes.

"And 'twas imperative that the man be appeased," Benoit went on calmly. "He was spoiling for a quarrel. His men outnumbered us more than three to one. They had come ashore armed, whilst our fighting tools were all put by during shore work. I saw his rascals disperse themselves through the hall; I caught their sly looks, their restless hands. Nay, lad, to thine unseeing eye we were one body, all against you. But I knew, I knew. Some small signal from him, and they would have set upon you and Jem, and me, and all my brave men, and cut us down like sheep."

The three stopped. They had reached the landing basin. On the wharfs to either hand lay the guns, ballast, small spars and other movable gear of the *Rose* snow, while on the beach between,

the craft herself lay careened. Men swarmed under her planking, scrubbing off the slimy green weeds; others were busy with her gear, overhauling and putting it in repair; still more moved on her canted deck with paint pot and hammer and saw. Beyond, the lagoon was empty.

" So be 'tis proof ye're wantin'," came Jem's voice huskily, " take wan peep at her larrboard cabin door."

" Ha! I want no proof, Jem, that all you've told me is true," said Benoit. " As for the door, I noted it this time yesterday. Neal is building a new one. They used the *Rose* hard, but we'll have her fit in a week or two."

Barnaby's eyes were moving slowly round the stockade, the basin, the still lagoon. " 'Tis next to incredible," he mused happily, " that we be here, and Rackham and Rowse be gone."

The captain's face sobered. " Aye. If John Rackham will hie him to the devil, he must, for all of me. There was nothing for it but to seem to be hoodwinked by their plan. They cleared on the early ebb yesterday, for New Providence they said — though I doubt that. They were to stand off and on the harbor entrance till I joined them for an attack on the haven." Abruptly he smiled, and added, " But 'twill not be off Providence that Rackham and I meet again."

" He'll be back, think you? " asked Barnaby.

"That he will! For the present, he knows the loot is safe, for I would not touch it, and he is free to acquire more yet — if more plunder exists than what you say now lies in that cave. But when he finds that I did not fall into the trap he laid for me, then he'll be back — for the treasure and for our lives that menace his enjoying it. And we'll meet him when he comes, with round shot."

"Whisht, sur! But have ye arrms and powder to stand him off, then?" Jem put in, brightening visibly.

"Well, yes, I saw to that. The *Rose* should be well armed, says I, if she's to play a part in the taking of Providence haven. Rackham had come by a great parcel of guns and bullets. We made an even division. I plan to moor the *Rose* in the slip here, bow out, with two twelve pounders on her forecastle. The rest of the metal we'll set up ashore. I have better than three score men, all of them true as steel. We could stand off an army of grenadiers — as for those cutthroat rags and tags, why mayhap we'll do even better."

"Do our men know of this?" says Barny, liking this brave news better and better.

"They will to-night."

And that night they did know. Cheers shook the stout log walls of the council hall as the truth of all that had befallen came slowly clear through the captain's words, and Salter and the little padre

and Carracioli and all the rest of his followers learned of Jem's and Barnaby's grievous adventures, and saw how the quick wit and courage of their leader had extricated them from a desperate pass. Cheers, and threats of vengeance. The big room hummed with excitement. Discussion rose and fell as plans were laid for this and that detail of defence.

The names of Rackham, Shattock, and " Harriot " were stricken from the articles of the State, and these men and any in their company were declared public enemies to be attacked and if possible captured on sight.

The gray light of dawn was seeping through the eastern windows before that meeting was adjourned. Upon its conclusion, after breaking their fast, all hands set to work without thought of rest. For no man could say how soon Rackham and Rowse would be back. And if the rogues were to be met properly, there was much to be done.

The company was divided into three parties. The first, under Carpenter Neal, continued with boot-topping and refitting the *Rose*. The little monk, as armorer, led the second in assembling powder and small arms, building gun platforms and distributing cannon at vantage points of the stockade, and supplying each piece with ready stores of shot. Carracioli, the Italian boatswain,

commanded the third, whose duty it was to cut clear trails through the jungle from the stockade to Cave Point (as the opposite extremity of the island had been named) and from thence round past the other shore of the lagoon to the cliff across the channel; and to patrol the trails and maintain a sharp lookout at both outposts.

Captain Benoit and Salter, now lieutenant through Rackham's defection, aligned themselves with no particular party but moved from one scene of work to another, encouraging, enlivening the men's spirits with a jest or cheery word, and bearing a quick hand here and there as occasion demanded.

Jem and Barny found themselves in the patrol.

The hunchback was told off with three or four others to keep lookout from the cliff. Of this, he said grimly, he was right glad, for he wished to be the first to see the dead men come. Day after day, as the work progressed, his bowed figure could be seen from the stockade, a black and motionless dot of alertness at the top of that bold promontory guarding the channel. A single musket shot was to be the signal of alarm.

Similarly, after the trail was cut, Barny found himself stationed at the cave.

There had been talk, that night of council, of removing the plunder across the island into the stockade for better defence. For it was no part

of Benoit's plan to permit the enemy to filch that mighty hoard some dark night and sneak off without a fight — if that should be his fancy.

But some voice from the ranks had suggested that, should they lay hands on the stuff and haul it inside their defences, what, in the eyes of a skeptical world, would distinguish them from the very men who were their enemies? The thought gave them pause. 'Twould be a sorry end for the State if, after fighting off Rackham, they should one and all be hanged for his piracies!

So the trails and the double guard were decided upon. The plan had advantages. If the attack came at Cave Point, a messenger could summon the entire force there, and the jungle would afford cover from which with small arms they could repel the ships' boats with which Rackham must land. If, on the other hand, 'twas the lagoon and the stockade that the enemy made for, communication with the point and the cliff would quickly establish the fact, and grape and partridge would give the rascal what-for.

The scheme was pretty in its completeness. One trifle alone went disregarded. Nothing had been said, nothing was done about the great jeweled cross and its appurtenances hid in the jungle. So much had befallen, and so swiftly withal, that that matter had fled clean out of Barny's mind.

CHAPTER XVII

PLOTS AND MARPLOTS

MEANWHILE Rackham and Rowse were bowling merrily westward. The former now termed himself " Admiral."

They too had held council, so soon as Benoit's island had dropped from view. Their hearts were light and their hopes vaunting. Their plan was to head for the Straits, with a whack at the plate-ship convoy if luck favored, and in a week's time — having thus given the gullible Frenchy opportunity to repair the *Rose* and reach New Providence Island — to hasten there and if possible witness and gloat over, mayhap take part in, his destruction. Whereafter, back to the island they'd go, and thence to foreign ports to roll in gold for the rest of their lives.

Events, however, changed their plans. Believing in the adage that the present should not be neglected if the future is to be enjoyed, they overhauled and took, off Eleuthera Point, a wretched Dutchman who furnished them with nothing better than a cargo of sugar cane and a piece of sorry news.

Albeit he was whipped the length of the *Dragon's* deck, this poor honest Netherlander stuck to his tale. The Spanish convoy, two galleons and two galleys and four *guardas del costa,* had got clear of the Straits this sennight past, and were now beyond the reach of gluttonous fingers.

It need not be said what was served Mynheer and his pantalooned crew for their obdurate honesty. The hundred-ton ketch and her cargo made a great stench and a fine glow in the sky that night.

Next day the gallant fleet of Admiral Rackham chanced upon a large sloop and, clapping on the wind, bore down upon her. She flew the two-cross jack of Britain, but the pirates were suspicious — there was a rakish set to her topsail. They hove to a cable's length away, and fired a shot to windward. The strange craft did likewise. As they had expected, here was a brother from the seas.

It turned out to be a man named Dewson in his

sloop *Revenge*. Rackham had heard of him, knew him for a brisk lad of his own kidney. Over a friendly bottle the three commanders exchanged gossip around the *Dragon's* cabin table. And a second piece of news, a most amazing piece, fell out upon the board.

This Dewson was small and dark and squint-eyed; emulating Teach, a greater rogue than he would ever have the heart to be, he had tied up the ends of his ratty black hair with fuses; and there was much dirty lace about his person. He leered crookedly, a gap in his teeth showing, as he pulled a scroll of sheepskin from his flapping coat pocket.

"What's that — articles?" pipes up Rowse in alarm. "A pest on these covenants! They turns my stummick!"

"Nay, friend, 'tis me pardon," Dewson cackled proudly.

Rackham started, and his lean face sharpened with a look of sinister cunning. "Pardon!" he marveled softly. "Now how came ye by that, Joel Dewson?"

Dewson told them, amid giggles. It seems a certain Governor Woodes Rogers had arrived with a great fleet of men-of-war in Providence haven, and under weight of this tremendous metal overawed and captured the town. Forthwith, armed with the King's commission, he had set up

his *régime* and driven some four hundred bully blades — including such notorious names as Davis, Joe Burgess, and Thomas Carter — to work!

"To work!" gasped Rowse as in pain. "Burn my blood, to work at what?"

"Fortifeecay-shuns," the pardoned one informed him. "Why, the town proved a sorry mess — not a house fit to live in, not a redoubt but sprouted weeds, and the only gun fit to set match to a foul nine-pounder the which they'd used for signalling. Ha! You may believe his Excellency laid about him. With the one hand he serves a man the paper that saves his neck, whilst with t'other he pushes him into labor that breaks his back."

"H-m-m," says Rowse very dourly.

But Rackham was thinking swiftly. 'Twould never do, now, to let Benoit come to Providence: there was something about the description of Governor Rogers that told him he and the Frenchman would have much in common. Benoit must be headed off, somehow.

"But how did you get clear, Joe?" he asked. "Why ain't you a-breaking your lazy back along with the other devils?"

Dewson let out a guffaw, and laughed till the tears rolled down his slack gray cheeks. "Aye, there's the very heart of the jest, matey. Old Joe

foxed him, sirrah! 'Yer Excellency,' says Joe, 'they's a bold bad pirate a-cruisin' off Hispaniola, sir — name of Thingumbob, and a very black-hearted devil of a man, sir. Now here's a bargain. You give old Joe his papers, and he'll bear away in the *Revenge* and cotch him fur ye.'

"Friends, he done it! And there's me pardon, and here be I scot free. So be any king's ship lays me aboard, why here's me credentials and I'm hard after Thingumbob. Ha, ha, hee, hee!" The wizened little man went off into squeaks of impish mirth.

There was silence in the *Dragon's* cabin. But over Rackham's face had spread a beatific smile. He had found an answer to his problem.

They parted company with the sloop *Revenge* soon after. Rackham ordered the course of his squadron changed. "We're for Providence and the king's grace," he announced benignly, and kept Rowse with him aboard the *Dragon*. Again under way, those two returned to her cabin.

Writing materials being produced, with much whispering and chuckling they commenced the creation of a plea for pardon. Rackham wrote, and Rowse knitted his thick brows over the fat words as they appeared.

"To His Most Sacred Majesty George, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, etc.

"The Humble Petition of the Company now belonging to the ship *Flying Dragon* & brig *Venture,* these lying under the ignominious name & wrongful denomination of Pirates — "

There was a knock at the cabin door. "Who comes?" snapped Rackham, nettled at the interruption.

A big square red face, champing steadily, was thrust inside.

"Cap'n," Shattock began —

"'Admiral,' you lousy dog!" Rackham corrected him. "Well?"

"Ad-Admiral — I — that is, some o' the men be sayin' — that is, in a manner o' speakin', sir, it do seem a scurvy trick to be shuttin' all hands out o' this palaverin'. Why look you, sir, we ain't next to yer designs and doin's no more'n if we was forem'st hands aboard a trader! Why, even that French scum had his articles and his council, sir, and — "

Shattock got no further. In a whirl of red cloak Rackham had risen, his face mottled with rage. He pointed a trembling finger.

"*Get out!*"

"I warn ye, sir — "

A twitch of the thumb, a thin glitter, and Rackham's poniard was quivering in the closed door at the exact height where his quartermaster's face had hung.

On the other side of the door, that face was not a pleasant sight. It stooped to the keyhole.

"Now then," Rackham was saying coolly, "we can proceed."

"— That we, your Majesty's most loyal subjects, were at one time forcibly taken by one André Paul Benoit & were by him compelled to enter into his company & serve as Pirates, much contrary to our inclinations. Now we, utterly abhorring that impious way of living, have departed and run away with the aforesaid *Flying Dragon* & *Venture,* with no other intent than the hopes of obtaining your Majesty's most gracious pardon. And we, knowing where the aforesaid Benoit doth hide himself for the furtherance of his piratical schemes and crimes, do crave your Majesty's gracious commission to set forth in search of him, to apprehend & discomfit him, and to hail him & his company of full three score before your Majesty's courts of Justice. To this we most humbly implore your Majesty's consent, through his Excellency your Commissioned Governor of the Island of New Providence in the West Indies, to this our humble petition."

'Twas done, and the two conspirators signed at the foot of the document.

"There!" said Rackham, rubbing the kinks out of his hand, "that'll fetch him, I warrant you."

"Ain't ye scairt," Rowse demurred, "that when we brings him in and he commences a-talkin'

to yon governor, someways they'll put us in the wrong?"

The other looked at him in scornful amazement. "Matt Rowse, you lack the brains of a leek! Broil me, sirrah, but we won't bring him in, *alive* — nor any bloody mother's son in his company. And when we finish with him, the loot is waiting there, and we're free men with our pardons in our pockets."

"Aye, that's it." Rowse smacked his lips over the prospect. And the council of two was adjourned with unanimous satisfaction.

So upon the morning of the next day the *Dragon* and the *Venture* sailed boldly into Providence haven. The harbor was crowded with shipping, Rogers's fleet and the dismantled craft of the pardoned pirates, so that the newcomers must needs anchor well out and under the lee of the islet guarding the channel. This fitted well with their plans, and in a brief time the *Dragon's* longboat had ferried the two humble petitioners to the landing.

They were stared at by groups of reformed freebooters laboring at quay building, strengthening the decrepit ramparts, and setting up tents of ships' canvas — stared at and greeted jestingly by an occasional old acquaintance. "Ho! Here comes a brace of gilded sinners more," went the word.

But they answered not to these sallies, and with no more than a glance to right or left, after inquiring the way to the governor's mansion, made off down the crowded, littered street. Soon a trainband stopped them and demanded their business, but when it was told, very promptly conducted them up the low hill overlooking the harbor, into the severe little house that topped it, and thus into the presence of his Excellency.

Governor Rogers, a bluff, beef-eating, white-periwigged person with a mild blue eye, sat behind his desk and read their petition in silence whilst they fumbled their hats round and round before him.

The governor had a guest at the table beside him — a tall, mustachioed gentleman of noble bearing, a naval officer by the cut of his clothes and the short sword at his belt; but he held his peace, and the two petitioners paid no more heed to him than they had to his frigate with her triple rows of gun ports and her banner of blue field and gold fleurs-de-lys whipping at the main. The proud warship of the child king, Louis of France, now lying at Providence on some secret mission, had been lost to their eyes in the maze of spars and crowded hulls along the foreshore.

"I like it well," said the governor at last, spying a baronetcy for himself if such a parcel of outlaws as the petition described could be brought

in; and forthwith to their great glee he ordered his secretary to indite their pardons.

In short order the two penitents were scampering down to the quay again. A tavern invited them: the day was young yet, and their throats were dry with nervous gulpings over that ticklish affair on the hill. Their pardons rustled bravely in their pockets as they sat them down and ordered up double noggins of rum.

Amazing how swiftly the day sped thereafter. 'Twas dark when they called the longboat, and Rowse's steps down the ladder were none too steady — ending, indeed, in an undignified tumble into the stern sheets, where he lay a-snoring. Neither man was sure of just what had happened since they parted with " their good friend," the governor. They had a confused recollection of a knot of envious hearers gathered round them in the tavern while they talked of this and that in mighty brave language. . . .

One thing was sure: their pardons were safe and sound. What else mattered?

Returning to his own quarter-deck, then, Rackham was amazed and furious to discover that Gabe Shattock was not aboard. He recalled the little disagreement of the day before and shook his fists at the lights of the town.

" There's a fine deserter for ye!" he rasped. " How'd he get away — swim? Ha! And

good riddance! May they refuse his pardon and hang him at sunup!"

He gave his former quartermaster no further thought.

As Rowse reached the rail of the *Venture,* however, a bulky shadow moved nimbly toward him, and a fist got him by the shoulder. Behind the fist steadily urging him below, a hoarse, hot breath, reeking of tobacco leaves, growled in his ear:

"Now by Moses, you and *me* will talk!"

Seated at the cabin table of the brig, Shattock jiggled with mirth as he took in the sorry and apprehensive figure of the man, now cold sober, across the board.

"Scairt, eh? I ain't goin' to hurt ye — just minded to show that flea-bit admiral what happens when he shuts out the best mate he ever had. Now hark. If this wind holds, two days'll see us back with the Frenchy. What's Jack's plan fur takin' him?"

Rowse licked his twisted lips. "He — he's goin' to mount a gun on the cliff over the ch-channel."

"Thought so. Now hark again. He'll want the lighter vessel fur that job, to lay 'longside the cliff out o' sight to south'ard and ease the carronade up all cosy. Minute we sights the island, you signal him to come alongside. Council o' war, see? And you propose this: by night he

takes the brig and skirts the island to south'ard, noses right up to the back side o' that headland and gits his piece set up on top. Meantime you, in the *Dragon,* will stand by off Cave Point to give him time. Then ye'll sail round to nor'ard, round the stockade side, meet him just at dawn by the channel entrance, and as the cliff opens fire, in ye'll go together."

"But — but where'll you be?" Rowse quavered.

"I'll be aboard the *Dragon* with ye, croaker! I'll have slipped acrost whilst you and him was takin' counsel."

"But where's the good o' changin' vessels?"

"'S life, but yer noodle's thick! Jack figgers to do fur the Frenchy first, then snatch up the loot and be off. Now don't ye see that by my plan we first gits the better craft, second has time to — to . . . well, you can guess what we'll be doin' down off Cave Point whilst he's a-settin' up the cliff battery — and third — "

"Won't he notice, when we meet him at channel entrance? With all that stuff aboard, the *Dragon*'ll set low in the water."

"Pest on ye, chicken kidney! 'Twill be night, I tell ye. He'll have no time to study her, with all there'll be on his mind. 'Lead on, Admiral!' you'll say to him. And in we goes to cut the Frenchy's heart out."

"Why not hang back right there, give Rackham the slip and be off?"

"Ah, man, he'd be after us, he'd foller us round the bleedin' world fur that plunder. Life wouldn't be worth livin' with Jack alive and knowin' we took it. No — we must go in with him, help him fix the Frenchy, and then — and then I'll fix him."

Rowse shivered. For a man lately carousing, he was shrunk to mighty unheroic compass. How he had come to be plotting with Shattock against Rackham, was a mystery to his fuddled brain.

"I like it not," he whined through his nose. "There's too much can go wrong. Say he finds us out. Say the *Dragon* gits sunk in the lagoon by the Frenchy's guns, with all that lovely stuff aboard of her. 'Tis flyin' in the face of — "

"Yah! Stow that! You wouldn't like it if ye was offered the gates of paradise on a gold platter. But you're a-goin' to do it, my dearie, whether ye like it or not!"

Gabe muttered as he settled his bulk on a locker for the night. In short order he was snoring peacefully. But Rowse sat long at the table, staring into the light.

At midnight, in accordance with Admiral Rackham's plan, the two ships slipped their cables and stood away to the eastward.

Hardly had they left anchorage before the

Providence foreshore stirred with brisk activity.

The governor's noble guest, Monsieur le Capitaine Marron by name, had chanced that evening to glance at the petition which had so easily wrought Rackham's and Rowse's salvation. He was curious, he said, to observe the British method in such an affair. But as he read, something more than curiosity opened his black eyes very wide.

"If it please you, my friend," says he, smiling strangely, "I too want that man."

"Eh? Then go get him." The governor chuckled genially over his port. "But mind you bring him hither before you hang him. I must have my credit of him for the dispatches home; then he's yours."

"Sir," persisted Marron gently, "the man is a redoubtable fighter. Should it chance that he be taken upon British soil, or on the seas, 'twere politic that — that —" He paused significantly. "At the present time, your sovereign and mine are upon the *best* of terms, my Governor," he concluded.

"I see," Rogers mused. "Well, take the *Delicia* for consort. She's ready. We'll go into this together, eh? I'll speak to Traherne; he'll be mighty tickled at the prospect of action."

"And I too am, as you say, tickled," Marron replied, beaming.

Thus it befell that, even as Rackham and Rowse were returning in the longboat — the one to miss and curse Gabe Shattock, and the other to find and curse him — the shrill squeals of bos'ns' pipes were collecting liberty parties along the Providence water front. Monsieur le Capitaine Marron and Commodore Traherne were, at about the same hour, having a friendly glass in the very tavern where Rackham and Rowse had made so merry, and picking up odds and ends of information from its jovial proprietor.

And before dawn, with a muted ruffle of drums, and quick steps and gruff commands, two tall frigates — one flying the fleurs-de-lys and one the white cross-jack at her main — warped out of their berths in harbor and set clouds of canvas to the soft night breeze.

They steered east. They had little but gossip and hazard to go by. But both warships were fleet sailers.

The *Dragon* and the *Venture* had a good six hours' start of them; this they increased next day by catching a fierce slant of wind in the open, whilst the men-of-war still idled among the islands.

Next day, too, they fell upon further evidence that the plate-ship convoy had escaped them —

two *guardas del costa* returning from the Straits to the Main. Out of sheer ill-humor — for the little craft would have given him a wide berth had he let them — Rackham signaled the *Venture* to give them iron and board.

'Twas done, albeit under unexpected difficulties, for the *guardas* were armed to the teeth for their convoy duty and once aroused showed great willingness to fight. For their pains, both Portuguese commanders walked the plank, and such of the crews as breathed after the engagement were cut adrift in their own boats without water, food, or oars. Then, after taking aboard the *Dragon* the immense store of powder and bullets with which his prizes had been equipped, Rackham blew them both to bits with partridge as he sailed away.

Rowse had fought that fight white-faced, as though he bore some unrestful matter on his mind. Gabe Shattock had watched it with grim interest from the protection of one of the *Venture's* forward gun ports — his little eyes sparkling, his jaws munching, munching. . . .

At dusk of that second day the *Dragon* and the *Venture* were well clear of Exuma Sound and off Rum Cay. By midnight, a dark blob ahead in the starlit night told them they were nearing their goal.

A whole day's sail astern of them now, the war-

ships of which they had no knowledge were slipping on apace.

Rowse saw the island. White-faced, chewing his lip, he signaled his admiral, requesting the two ships be laid alongside for a council of war.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CLIFF

The night was long, but long too was Jem's patience. The night was moonless, luminous with star haze and black as tar on the wide water; but Jem's eyes plumbed the gloom with a steady, unblinking intensity, as if like a cat he could see in the dark.

He could see; in his fancy he had many times seen — what he wanted to see: two ships sailing on to their doom.

His hot Celtic pride, mortally aggrieved by Rackham's easy triumph in the council hall, bubbled and hissed like a cook pot at slow, deep simmer. He had no shadow of doubt as to the outcome, when that red renegade chose to return for his reward; he would come in here and without

warning be pounded to pieces by the guns of the moored *Rose,* by the shore batteries hidden and stoutly protected by the stockade.

At intervals, forsaking the dark horizon, the hunchback looked to his fusil that was to give the alarm — cleaned it through long practice by the sense of touch, though it was already speckless; reloaded, primed, and cocked it. A hundred times he made sure his powder was dry, the cap lively.

One other piece of armament he had, and this too he patted and fussed over, muttering as if it were a friend to be confided in through the lonely watches. 'Twas no more than a rum bottle, one of that store of grenadoes that had lain in the *Rose* snow's lazaret — saved when he and Barnaby had swum ashore, and now refilled with powder and metal scraps and topped with a new slow match. This gewgaw would hardly kill a man, exploding; but you could light and throw it, and surely 'twould make a handsome crash — mayhap prove just the thing needed to fend off a sortie.

He often thought of young Barny, that merry gossoon of the wiggling ears who had proved so sturdy a partner during all their troubles. Often he wished Barny were with him now. He visaged him on watch at the other extremity of the island, Cave Point, and he wondered how it went with him.

And then all wonders ceased in the hunchback's

head, and he leaped to his feet on the bare rock and stood rigid. He rubbed his eyes — looked again — and gave a short, quick laugh of child-like pleasure.

Over Cave Point and far to the westward, the running lights of two ships had swum out of the blackness and hung, small pin points of glimmer in the vast night. They crawled nearer with a steady and furtive motion, as if a cautious hand were pushing them over the quiet sea.

Jem grinned, hissing a little through his teeth. The blood was hammering at his throat. In a sudden fever of impatience his toe beat a tattoo on the rock, and he caught up the gun —

But with finger tightening on the trigger, paused. Two ships were merely two ships; many passed this way. He had received strict orders not to give the signal until he was certain sure, for well Benoit knew the ill effects of false alarms.

He must wait, the hunchback decided. He did so, standing stiff as the rock beneath him, with the musket at ready in his hands and his eyes trained on those moving lights.

Soon he saw a strange thing.

The lights neared each other, swung slightly, and stopped. Those ships had come together. If Rackham was there, he might be lying in wait for daylight or deciding upon a plan — surely

he would not contemplate a boat attack from that remote position. But on the other hand, if the two vessels were but innocent mariners voyaging in company for protection, belike they had spied the black hump of the uncharted island and were taking counsel whether to risk their cargoes among unknown shallows or lay snug there till daylight.

Which? Not a sound broke the strange, pregnant hush of sky, island, and sea. Jem longed for light — one glance at the distant hulls and spars of those vessels, and all doubt would be gone. He turned with an impatient mutter to the east, but there was no patch of gray in the curtain of darkness. 'Twould be all of an hour before dawn.

When he turned back, the lights had parted. And to his disgusted surprise it was evident that the ships were going separate ways.

The larger (if one could judge by the strength of her lanterns) was now headed northeast, apparently to the purpose of skirting the island on the stockade side of the lagoon; the smaller bore to the south and approached the cliff along the nearer shore.

Then the lights of both phantom ships winked out as the lofty foliage of the island hid them, leaving Jem in blacker doubt than before.

Pest! he thought wrathfully. Why should the

spalpeens sheer so close in? Couldn't be Rackham, after all, for no possible plan would persuade that cowardly bully to divide his forces. He'd go straight for the point or straight for channel, with all he had.

They must be traders, then. Having come upon the island by chance, they were seizing the opportunity to take soundings on both sides. Soon they would appear to view at this end, meet, and sail on peaceably, none the wiser.

Still, there was but one course for a proper lookout to take now. Watch the channel. If by a miracle 'twas indeed Calico Jack, and he'd planned this circling maneuver to end at the entrance in a dash for the lagoon, the signal must speak before those bows swung inward.

So Jem felt his way to the northerly edge of the cliff and hunkered down, staring out into the dark gulf that was the channel. Even with doused lights, they could not win past, he vowed grimly, without his hearing; they'd have to warp in, groping through the dark, and there were sure to be sounds, so close there. He crouched, his musket across his knees, all eyes, all ears. . . .

Presently there was a sound; but it floated over the cliff top directly behind him! An anchor cable on the run.

Jem loosed a grunt of exasperation. For the first time he felt the little tickling of fear. Was

it banshees abroad, the night? He was loth to leave this post of certain necessity, but when minute after minute dragged by in perfect silence, he told himself he ought at the least to have a look from the other side.

Stealthily he got up and crossed the cliff top, and peered out and down in the direction from which that single, ominous sound had come.

He could see nothing. But he could hear low voices — a dull rumbling as of a trundled weight — and boots thudding on rock.

'Twas they!

Instantly the musket cracked, spurting a red tongue into the blackness.

Silence descended. And then, below, there was a hoarse cry of amazed anger, and the sounds redoubled with a rush.

Heartsick at this unpremeditated extremity, the hunchback threw a look at the sleeping lagoon, the dark stockade. Had they heard? He looked down ahead of him, and made out vague black figures struggling upward. He made his decision then.

Clubbing his musket, he crept down upon them.

He counted a dozen men. For a brief space their actions puzzled him; 'twas hauling at some heavy burden they were. Then he caught the squat grim shape of the carronade in their midst, heard the squeak of its trunnions on planks, the

grating rub of the laden ammunition sledge that followed.

And with that, never pausing to reckon his chances, Jem leaped in among them. With one hoarse cry he leaped, and his clubbed musket whirred and began to deal solid, crunching blows in the crowded darkness. They would, would they? "Take that, ye trait'rous dog! — and that!"

Gasping shouts — a groan — mad confusion. The cannon slipping, slipping . . .

In truth, fate would have dealt harshly with that cliff-scaling venture had not the leader, Lumley, alert to rest the toilers now and then, seen what the others had not. His gaze had been up and forward, theirs had been fixed on the ground. When Jem leaped and swung, Lumley crouched to slip his precious block under the skidding wheels. Then he stepped briskly forward with his rammer.

Waiting his chance, he lifted the heavy bar, iron shod, high overhead — and brought it down with a prodigious smash upon their assailant's skull.

Poor Jem! How summary, how ignominious an end to his plucky charge. The yarn thrum cap he wore hardly warded that vicious blow. Before his eyes the sky cracked wide open with hissing lightning. The fusil dropped from his nerveless hands. He took a staggering step forward,

swayed, fell headlong, and commenced to roll and slither down the steep incline. More dead than alive, he brought up with a jar against a stunted tree fifty feet below.

One of the men on the cliff top growled, " Best go down and make sure of him."

" Bah, he's done fur. Lay on, now," ordered Lumley, " or we'll be too late."

CHAPTER XIX

THE STOCKADE

BARNABY reached the west gate of the stockade and beat madly on its heavy timbers. After an insufferable dead pause, the gate swung outward and a sleep-drugged guard held a lantern to the boy's haggard face. He dashed in, making straight for the captain's hut.

No need to knock here; the door was open. As he crossed the threshold into yet deeper darkness, Barnaby knew the man stretched on the pallet was full awake.

"Sir!" he panted — "the enemy — "

"Ha!" Benoit sat up. "But how can that be? We've had no signal from the cliff — certes, you're mistaken, Barny."

"Nay sir, I swear it! 'Tis the *Dragon* herself!"

"Alone?"

"We saw no other. She hove round the point from sou'west'ard, close in, and let go an anchor. As I started, I heard boat falls. Oh, sir, there's no shadow of doubt, and— "

"You left Cocklyn and Marsh as planned, at the cave?" The captain's voice was cool and hard.

"Aye, sir. God grant they be there yet. I came as quick — "

"Fetch Salter."

As the two words left his lips, the still air echoed to the sharp crack of a musket. Before the sound died, Benoit was on his feet.

"Late, Jem, late, for all thy proud boasting!" he muttered. Then to Barny, "'Tis John Rackham, sure enough. He has given the brig the slip, very likely, and is making straight for Cave Point and the plunder. We must send a party down — fetch Salter!"

A lean gray dawn was creeping in the doorway; shapes of buildings loomed dimly visible outside. Already the alarm was general — a door slammed, feet thudded somewhere, and a sleepy voice asked was it thunder? Running figures seemed to rise off the bare ground.

Barny had not long to look for Salter; he ran

plump into the man on his way to the captain, and they two returning met Benoit at his door.

"The signal, Cap'n — I've piped to stations." There was an eager ring in Salter's voice.

"*Bien!* Hark 'ee, Salter. The *Dragon* is off the point, probably sending boats ashore. We must spare twenty men to hold 'em off till I can get the *Rose* out and engage her. Not a minute to lose — Cocklyn and Marsh are down yonder alone there. Choose your men, Salter — take 'em here and there as they can be spared from the guns. Let the lad lead on — he knows the trail well. Bid the padre serve out muskets, cutlasses, grenadoes. Haste now, Lieutenant, an you love me!"

In the gray twilight Benoit was already running toward the basin. He turned for a last word: "And send me down a party to get the *Rose* clear!"

"Aye, sir."

Now the swift daybreak had all but come. Men crowded about Salter, pleading to join his party. Arms clinked, feet stamped, bodies sped here and there in a panic of haste and eagerness. Benoit had just gained the wharf and was about to spring aboard the snow, when —

Boom!

Every man stopped in his tracks. Something big and black hummed through the air — and a

nine-pound shot buried itself in the sand at their feet.

So sudden and inexplicable was this savage intruder that the bravest blanched, gaping first at the hole in the ground, then at the clear and lightening heavens. 'Twas Benoit who first recovered himself. He cried out sharply, pointing; and all eyes turned to the cliff.

There on its rounded top stood the cannon, outlined against a pearly sky. About it men bustled, ramming home a second charge. And a little apart, a half-naked, thick-set figure recognizable as Lumley held an object glass to his eyes and with raised arm directed the firing. In an incredibly brief space there was a second report from that lofty vantage point, and this time the ball crashed through the council hall roof. Up on the cliff, the gun crew danced and cheered.

Then Benoit came running from the beach. He was cool, he was smiling; but his gray eyes glinted. With his back disdainfully on the cliff, he addressed a white-faced, whispering parcel of men on the verge of terror.

" So they've outmaneuvered us at the start," he chuckled gayly. " So much the worse for them at the final reckoning. The first shot was theirs, the last shall be ours. Men " — his voice lashed out abruptly — " here's a test of mettle! Get your party mustered, Lieutenant Salter, and be off.

We'll attend to these Alpine snipers. To stations! And the first gun crew to score a hit on yon pop-gun receive petty officers' ratings and seats in the council!"

The third shot now burst in their very midst, killing two men instantly.

But 'twas too late to exert the demoralizing effect on which Rackham had counted. Benoit's vital influence, his supreme assurance and courage, had already caught up and inspired his band. There was a wild storm of cheering. And in less time than it takes to tell it, Salter's party, led by Barnaby, had slipped through the west gate which slammed behind them, and every man of the garrison remaining was at his post, serving ammunition, priming, sighting — firing.

With the first volley, the State flag was run up, and the morning breeze off the sea snatched and whipped it out in brave defiance. The ground trembled under the shock of that salvo. Through the pungent smoke that filled the air, eyes sought the cliff.

Still there. 'Twould take them a little to catch the elevation and range. Benoit was everywhere, now heartening the crews at work below with the *Rose's* long twelves, now visiting the padre's makeshift dressing station, now leaping on a gun platform under the stockade to sight and touch off a piece himself. The air rang with thunderous

roars as each gun fired at will. Powder monkeys staggered from magazine to stations, through smoke like fog and rifts of bright sunshine. Shot splashed fountainwise in the lagoon, thudded dully in the sand, opened splintered gaps in the palings and tore great jags in the exposed roof of the council hall.

Until, as abruptly as the bombardment had started, 'twas silenced by a cry. "Gone!"

Slowly the smoke drifted clear. Save for a huddled figure or two, the top of the cliff was bare.

Nobody knew whether the cliff battery and its crew had been full hit by canister or whether the gun had burst amain for want of proper cleaning and cooling. Nobody cared; the fact was there. That hornet had been stamped upon. Sweating, bloody men gave vent to their relief in a shout that shook the earth.

Yet almost at once the gallant wave of sound broke, thinned and died. Benoit had taken no part in it. He was standing on a slight eminence near the half-demolished council hall, shading his eyes with his hand. Many thought he gazed at the cliff; but in fact his look was directed to the left of its base, across the sand spit on this side and toward the channel. Men saw his free fist suddenly clench, his back stiffen.

"Reload!" he cried out in a great voice of

tragic import. "Reload, aim over the *Rose* at the middle of the lagoon — but stay your matches till I give the word!"

Wondering, unable to see what their leader saw, but never doubting the imminence of new danger, they did as bidden and stood crouched by their pieces, waiting . . .

Then over the hushed air came a little rustling as of spurned water, and with creaking blocks and canvas flapping two ships slid into the lagoon. The brig known as the *Venture* was leading. After her, strangely low in the water, crept the big *Flying Dragon.*

In ominous silence the two craft came on to a point directly opposite the landing basin. At each bow and stern, cables paid out anchoring the hulls broadside to the shore. There was an instant of breathless stillness.

And then a scarlet arm on the brig's poop went high, a pistol barked — and as if in terrific answer six and thirty gun ports belched fire and iron point-blank at the stockade.

"*Fire!*" Benoit thundered.

CHAPTER XX

CAVE POINT

About an hour later, Salter's party returned. There was no need to ask admittance: the west gate was down. Over its ruins they swarmed into the heart of a shambles.

Against gunfire from the lagoon, because of the rising ground on which the settlement had been built, its stockade offered indifferent protection. The batteries, instead of using the loopholed ports through which Benoit had expected to bombard the enemy while still in the channel, must needs back off from their embrasures, swivel round a full quarter circle, and shoot over their mates' heads.

The warehouses and wharfs had been pounded to rubbish, and the *Rose* moored between was now

a shattered hulk — swung half about and careened, her high larboard bulwark to the water. Behind this makeshift fortification, one of her two gun crews was still blazing away.

Up above in the clearing, the council hall stood virtually roofless; smaller buildings showed gaping holes, and one burned briskly with a crackle of pitch. Through rifts in the acrid smoke that filled the enclosure, four or five guns could be seen working; the others had burst or stood idle for want of men. Here and there the trampled sand showed dark stains, bits of clothing, broken weapons, and the still figures of men.

As for the two attacking vessels, the brig was done for; she had sunk by the stern till her rudder post lay on the bottom of the lagoon and her bow pointed aloft, still now and then spitting red like a snake with crushed tail. The *Flying Dragon,* lying nearer the channel entrance and thus a little out of direct range, was better preserved; but her tall foremast had been shorn off to a stump, and her bulwarks were riddled.

The firing, which had commenced with thunderous volleys, had thinned to an intermittent, dogged fusillade.

Taking in all this grisly work at a glance, and with no more comment than a tightening of the lips, Salter bade Barnaby find the captain and report; then himself quickly assigned his band

to various idle cannon and joined their iron tongues to the uproar.

The lad found Benoit serving a piece on the upper slope. His left arm hung limp in a blood-soaked sleeve, his face was black with powder down which ran runnels of sweat. Seeing who came, he leaped down off the platform and drew Barny away to a bit of shelter afforded by the wreck of a hut.

"Well, *mon brave?*" he panted, "so they have hoaxed us every way?"

"So it seems, sir," says Barny in a low voice, his heart wrung by the sight of their leader at such a tragic pass. "By time we'd gained the point, the *Dragon* was gone — and the treasure too."

"What! So that's why she lays so low! Has it aboard her; now that's passing strange! Why should John Rackham risk it through the fight? And Cocklyn and Marsh?"

"Marsh was slain, sir — cut down at the cave mouth. Cocklyn they left for dead in their haste, but we brought him back breathing, and Salter says he may live. They did their best."

"Aye, poor devils! Brave hearts, Barny, brave hearts . . ." Benoit seemed lost in musings. Suddenly he looked up. "Salter's bearing a hand here, I see, and that's well. Yet here's a matter I cannot fathom. How comes Rack-

ham in command of the brig instead of his own craft? I have it! They approached the channel from opposite quarters — the brig from the south'ard, the *Dragon* around the spit. Rackham had shifted to the brig for setting up his cliff battery, and he lacked time to change again, most likely."

"Very like, sir. The cliff battery seemed as if his work. Think you that — Jem is a goner?"

"I fear it, Barny. 'Twas thus he paid a stern price for negligence. Had he signaled at once —"

"I can't believe it, sir!" the lad broke out passionately. "There must be more to 't than we know. The way they came —"

"Ah, well, God grant thou'rt right. There be many I'd liefer lose than Irish Jem. But I must get back to my gun. Stay near me, Barny; I've had sore need of a runner. We must blast the scoundrels into submission before they kill the last of us. Now go tell Salter —"

What Benoit wished to impart to his aide will never be known. He and Barnaby had regained the gun platform, and as he uttered the last words the captain was sighting his reloaded cannon — sighting it square on the wreck of the brig. But instead of touching it off with the match handed to him, he straightened up, staring at his mark.

"So soon?" he murmured, beginning to smile;

then in a voice that carried to every part of the stockade: " Cease firing! "

A white rag was fluttering at the brig's forestay.

Now singing silence fell across the lagoon. Men dropped, exhausted, wherever they had happened to be standing. For the first time since early morning, the pall of smoke that had hung over the place was wafted away. Far off in the jungle, a bird sang high and clear.

Rackham's red cloak could be seen leaping into a boat under the brig's bows, and presently he was sculling himself across the still water. Halfway to the wrecked wharfs, he stood up, cupping fists to his mouth.

" A parley! " he called, his smooth ingratiating voice falling queerly on that scene of havoc. " I come alone, unarmed, craving the honor of a private interview with Captain Benoit."

At that moment Barny, who had followed his commander part way to the landing basin, remarked that the petitioner wore thigh boots of loose black leather, into which his petticoat breeches of calico were tucked. This, for a man whose habit had been to go bare-legged, seemed very strange.

" Arrant dog! " Benoit was muttering. Barny could see he was half minded to refuse the impudent request, demand complete surrender or

issue at arms. But as the keen gaze of the captain roved over the destruction already wrought — the smashed buildings, the dead, the still quick regarding him with patient, haggard, but ever loyal eyes — he seemed to make up his mind.

"Granted!" he called back sternly. "I will meet you in my hut, John Rackham."

Waiting for no more, Barny slipped away. He knew there would be small use in protesting Rackham's boots to Captain André. It had come to him in a flash that if Calico Jack were to be allowed to wear boots during the interview, at least Captain André should not be left alone. Had he not bade his runner bide near him?

Unnoticed in the general attention fixed on the lagoon, Barny ran up the slope, round a corner of the riddled council hall, and into Benoit's hut. A jagged hole in the western roof let a pool of sunlight through on to the table. And there as in a golden frame, lay Benoit's cane.

The boy caught up the glossy rod of ebony — and was on the point of slipping under the pallet with it, when something held his eye. This was the first time he had touched that cane, the only personal weapon the captain ever used. The light caught and gleamed upon its silver knob; a fine device was engraved there: a three-petaled flower somewhat like the blue iris he had known in the Nonantum marshes at home, and beneath that,

a tiny scroll bearing two short words in a foreign tongue. French? Like enough. The device had the look of a crest, or coat-of-arms. What could it mean?

At the sound of approaching footsteps, he dived, cane and all, under the captain's pallet.

He saw two pairs of legs entering the hut. Benoit's paused as he addressed some one, apparently Salter, outside.

"Food is what they chiefly need. Muster them in the council hall, feed them, and let them rest. 'Twill be time enough to-morrow to bury our dead and start repairs."

"But — "

"Nay, fear not. All will go well here." And the captain came in quickly, shutting the door.

The leather boots of Rackham limped stiff-legged to the table. "'Tis an old wound i' the knee pan gives me quirks now and then," he was saying as in explanation, and sat him down in one of the two chairs at table, his right leg out straight. "Ouch! Now then."

Benoit seated himself across the board, facing his enemy and, beyond him, the door. Was it chance, thought Barny, that the red cloak should take the nearer seat and so put himself between the other man and the only exit?

"Be brief, pray," Benoit said coolly. "There are many matters call — "

"Aye, Cap'n. 'Tis only this. Here we be a-pounding each other to bits. Says I, where's the need of it?"

Benoit laughed mirthlessly. "Who began the pounding?" he challenged.

"I know, I know. But look 'ee. I knew not ye were of such stout mettle here. 'Twas all a mistake. A round shot or two, thinks I, and he'll see we mean business and come to reason."

"To reason! Now what mean you by that?"

Foolscap rustled. Rackham had bent low over the table. In the stillness of the hut could be heard the slow drip, drip of blood from Benoit's wounded arm to the floor.

"Big-hearted," came the silky low voice — "that's me. Take a look at this document. 'Tis the King's gracious pardon extended to one John Rackham, from the seas! I got it in New Providence out of the hands of his Excellency, Governor Rogers himself."

"Well?"

"Why, look. There'll be one there for you too! Come, think you naval officers will give credence to your daft articles of government? Nay, by Moses! Thou'rt a pirate, sirrah, just as was Calico Jack — is no more. Now then. Away with me to Providence in the *Dragon*. I'll go my sainted oath ye'll get your papers, just as I have mine. Then at first opportunity, back

we'll hie us to the cave yonder that you and me knows so well. Aboard we'll take the greatest load o' treasure ever stout heart fought for and won. And off we'll go — "

" Now I know your plan false," Benoit broke in, speaking very cold and slow, " for this reason, if for no other: the cave is empty."

Rackham's chair crashed over as he leaped to his feet. " Ha! So ye've moved it — played me for a gull — ye — "

" I have not touched it. Yet I have guessed where it lies. 'Tis aboard your own ship, Rackham. The moment I saw her so low in the water — "

His weary voice was interrupted by a snarl of frightened rage. Rackham had whirled to the hole in the roof, from where he could glimpse the *Dragon,* lying so still out yonder in the lagoon. But in another moment he was back beside the table, and the snarl had become a blatant laugh of returned confidence.

" Thou liest, frog-eating dog! " he spat out. " For a bit ye gave Jack a turn. Low in the water? 'Tis but a great store of powder and shot we took off a brace of dirty Portygees the night before last. I tell ye, the old *Dragon's* full to the eyes with fire and thunder — and with that we'll be finishing off this job, unless you make up your mind at once. Come, now. You've heard me.

I'm not worried where the loot is. You come and do as I say, or — "

" Save your breath, Rackham." Benoit had not risen, nor had his voice altered. " I will not go with you, for the purpose you mention or any other. Time for words has passed."

" Ye branded runaway! Let steel speak then!"

There was an instant of deathlike quiet — then from Benoit a sharp, incredulous gasp.

Barny, watching from beneath the pallet, had seen Rackham's right hand slink to his boot top. Even as the naked cutlass whipped out, the lad's warning cry filled the hut. Out he rolled, up he sprang, and was able with Benoit's cane partly to ward off the descending blade.

Only partly, for Calico Jack swung amain. His steel caught the hard black wood a glancing blow, sheered two palms' length off the tip as if it had been rubber, and — still hissing downward — laid open the captain's head from top to brow.

Then, so stricken, Benoit struggled to his feet. For a space he swayed, pale as ashes, the blood coursing down his face past the eyes in which had blazed at last a white-hot fire.

" For that," he said thickly, and took what was left of his cane from Barnaby — " for that, thou black-hearted craven, may God give me strength to — "

He fell like a tree and lay still on the floor.

Barny sobbed aloud, and had stooped to aid him when low words forced him back against the pallet.

"Aha!" Calico Jack was paying his fallen enemy no heed. His eyes, fixed on the cowering boy, were alight with glee; his mustachio twitched like a cat's. "Once too often hast thou come betwixt Calico Jack and his purpose. Prattler! Spawn of Boston! The point or the edge? Thou already-carrion, choose!"

The cutlass whistled; but in the nick of time Barny ducked and swerved, and the blade buried itself in the packed earth floor.

Senseless with rage, instead of catching the boy with his bare hands, Rackham struggled to free his weapon. Barny reached the door. As he burst it open, he turned and saw the red cloak, his cutlass clear, start in pursuit. He grinned impishly, and shot away.

Rackham was following! The captain lived, surely; if the wound had cleft his skull he would have succumbed instantly, without word or move. To get Rackham away might save him.

The lad glanced once round the deserted clearing and made at breakneck speed for the west gate.

Heavy steps pounded behind him as he darted down the trail. That was well! Again, dusk was coming; the westing sunlight had thinned, the

shadows across the path were long and blue. On he raced, counting on his own fleetness, the other's unaccustomed boots. Somewhere in the coming darkness of the jungle he hoped to elude his pursuer, and so get back to the stockade.

There was a roaring in his ears, beaten and broken by shouted curses and the thud of plunging feet. Was he gaining? He threw a look over his shoulder and saw the red cloak, cutlass flickering, but a dozen paces behind.

He tore out of the brush and sped along the water's edge. He gained the point as his pursuer emerged upon the beach; he doubled it, leaping amongst the piled rocks, the jutting ledges, and dropped behind a giant boulder at the cave's very mouth before Rackham had reappeared to view.

The thundering footsteps neared, scuffed on the threshold, and — as he had hoped, leaped into the cave. The voice he hated rasped: "Now I have thee —"

Silence fell.

Across it came the sharp clatter of a falling weapon. And then a horrible, low choking sound . . .

Barnaby crept to the entrance and peered within.

At one side of the opening Marsh huddled with a ghastly grin as of triumph on his dead face. In

the center of the cave Rackham braced rigid, his hands at his mouth and the eyes of him bogging from their sockets as he shot anguished glances into the dripping, empty corners of that place that had been stuffed with gold.

"Gone?" he quavered. "Gone? Then who — how — *Oh!*"

The last word was a bellow of fury as he saw the boy in the doorway. He spun half around — then checked himself, growing very still, very crafty, murderously cool.

His eyes slid downward to the cutlass lying between them on the floor.

CHAPTER XXI

DOOM

Rackham put a foot over the naked blade. Then holding the boy with his eye, he bent with reaching hand to pick up the cutlass.

But before he touched it, Barny, seeing his last chance, leaped in from the entrance and drove his fist — round, brown, tough as young oak — into the man's slack middle.

The impetus of his charge and well-nigh every ounce of his wiry body were behind the blow. He had thought only to prevent Rackham from retrieving the weapon and slaying him forthwith. To his delighted amazement, Rackham, caught unawares and off balance, grunted with pain — buckled in the middle — and went over back-

wards. He fell heavily and lay gasping for breath.

Young Barny fell a-trembling like an aspen. He picked up the cutlass and stood staring at it, fingering it awkwardly. What now? Could he kill a man — even this man? Yet how else save his own life? In that moment of uncertainty, a few words from the council hall ran into his head like a stream of clear water: " to be attacked and if possible captured."

A sound made him look down. Rackham was crouched to spring. His eyes shone green in the dusk. He straightened into a swift crimson blur —

Acting on panicky impulse, the boy snatched the blade in both hands and swung the hilt on that low charging head.

Rackham stopped as if he had hit a wall. He took two dancing steps, swayed, and sagged down sidewise into a crumpled heap. This time he lay very still.

Barnaby tossed the cutlass into a far corner; then for a moment stared like a man awakened from sleep at the red blood trickling off his scratched hands. Only for a moment. He shook himself — peered round him — and not finding what he sought, stooped over the flowing red cloak.

He eased the garment off the senseless man and tore it into strips. Working swiftly and surely

now, he bound Rackham's ankles tightly, and his wrists behind his back. 'Twas all but dark in the cave, but he hauled and knotted those strips of cloth till escape was impossible. He inspected his work. He laughed shortly and stood up.

As he left the cave he heard behind him the first groaning oaths of the man's awakened consciousness, and he grinned and wiggled his ears. "With his own cloak," he chuckled, "and a prisoner in his own secret cave!"

Well pleased with himself, he commenced to run. But soon his face fell sober.

Had Captain André bled to death while his men, thinking him still closeted with Rackham, looked to their hurts and ate and rested? God forbid! A hollow triumph, his own here at the cave, if that awaited him. The fear lent his legs new strength. Along the beach, into the bush, and up the trail he sped through swiftly gathering darkness as if a dozen Calico Jacks were at his heels.

No guard stopped him at the smashed stockade. The clearing lay under the spell of a sodden hush. From the ruins of the council hall he heard voices. Above, in the last light of day, the white flag stirred gently on its staff, still calmly afloat over that scene of merciless destruction.

So Barny reached the captain's hut and was on the point of entering when a sight of the interior

stopped him. As he gaped into that still place, something rose in his throat and would not be swallowed.

Captain André was stretched on the pallet, his eyes closed, his handsome face pale as death. But not dead, *not dead!* the boy breathed fiercely. Over the long still figure stooped the little padre in his monkish robe, gently bathing the face topped now with a bloody bandage, and mumbling tenderly.

As the boy watched, the gray eyes of the man he loved opened.

So help had come. Somebody had heard, somebody had seen the door left open when he, then Rackham, burst through it.

Elation filled Barny's heart. He ached to dash in and tell of his feat. He stood irresolute, knowing that would be no way to greet a man sorely wounded, yet loth to leave the spot.

Well, he thought, he would sit down and wait. When the padre came out, he would ask him if he might have a few words with the captain. Surely the captain would be glad to know that his arch enemy was captured.

So thinking, the lad squatted down by the door, all his muscles run to water by this abrupt peace. He gazed dully out across the clearing, beyond the tumbled pile that had been wharfs, over the derelict *Rose,* at the still lagoon all pink and gold

in the dusk. His head nodded slowly toward his knees . . .

When suddenly he started, and in a flash was on his feet.

Something had moved, out there on the water. On the silence had sounded a small splashing as of furtive oars!

Over the cliff and the tall jungle opposite, the last radiance of dying day had left a broad streak of saffron. Barnaby couldn't see clearly — he shaded his eyes with his hand — but something was happening; he knew it, he felt it.

His questing eyes found the brig, her stark bow pointed at the sky. Not there! To the left. To the tall ship, black, with empty, reaching spars — a gaunt ghost in the swimming haze. Was it? — No. Yes!

The *Flying Dragon* was moving — without sails!

Barny's mouth opened, but the intended cry of warning died in his throat. In that instant he had seen the truth. Low under the *Dragon's* bow, a dark spot that must be her longboat was pulling her gently, cautiously, toward the channel.

Get Salter! came the thought, and the boy found himself streaking toward the council hall. Halfway there, with his eyes still glued to the moving ship, he stopped with a gasp.

At this moment the ship had reached the chan-

nel and was creeping by the face of the cliff. Against its blackness her hull was invisible. But, seen from this angle, her lofty spars just topped the rounded crest of rock — her trucks, rigged with cobweb gear, and a triced-up end of a skysail yard marched, thinly black and clear, across the ruddy glow still mantling the sky. What had stopped Barny was a little thing he saw, up there.

A thing like a round black bug, which, as the skysail yard passed, suddenly leaped from the cliff top — caught the spar — and clung, riding on with it out of the radiance into the night.

Barny flung open the council hall door.

"Salter!" he shouted, wild-eyed. "Salter!"

Men started up from the crowded floor. The group around the table stopped eating to turn and stare. Lights guttered in the sudden draught; through the broken roof, stars twinkled.

Salter picked his way forward. "Come in, lad, and eat and rest," he said munching. "Where 've ye been all this — "

Barny caught the man's sleeve.

"The *Dragon*'s gone! Jem with her. You must launch a boat, quick, or — "

"What's this?" Salter stepped briskly to the threshold and peered out. The sky had faded to a feeble glimmer; the lagoon was black as pitch. The man turned back and laid a cool hard hand to Barnaby's brow.

"There, now," he muttered soothingly. "Barny, ye're unstrung, that's what. See ye not her light out yonder?"

And sure enough, at about the spot where the *Dragon* had lain, there was now visible a white anchor light.

"'Tis a ruse, I tell you! They left it in a boat on her anchor cable. I tell you, she's gone — I saw her pass the cliff but a moment ago — and I saw Jem jump to her skysail yard! I tell you, I saw it with my eyes!"

Barny's voice had risen to a feverish gibbering; he was pale, his lips and hands were twitching. About him and Salter had now gathered a whispering group.

"Poor old Jem's past jumping, lad," said Salter gently. "Now hark 'ee. This'll all look better to ye, come mornin'. Poor tyke! Gone beyond yer rope, that's what you have. Come in and have a bite and a blanket, and — "

"Ye blind fool!" Barny screamed, and was gone into the dark.

Left staring, Salter said quick and low, "After him, you Steele and Draper. He ain't fit to be loose, alone. Bring him back if ye have to carry him."

The two bidden started. But neither had remarked which way the boy had gone. The clearing was now in utter darkness save for the light

shining through the rents in the council hall and Benoit's hut. The searchers set off in opposite directions, stumbling over the débris of battle, calling " Ho, Barny! " into the black silence.

Barny was already out of earshot. Had he not been, he would have paid no heed.

He had ducked through a rift in the stockade on its eastern side and was running pell-mell for the sand spit at the mouth of the inlet. He had no plan: his sole desire, now that help from Salter was impossible, was to remain near the departing *Dragon* for as long as he could — and mayhap get one more sight of hunchback Jem, who had, he was dead certain, leaped aboard her.

As he ran, he tried to think. He knew, of course, why the *Dragon* had slipped away. Rowse and Shattock had secured the treasure and, while their commander was engaged in parleying ashore, had conceived the cowardly notion of abandoning him there and getting off free. But why — why had Jem gone with them?

Doubts clutched at the lad's heart. Could it be possible that Jem knew the plot? Even he would not have the temerity to hope that he could subdue the parcel of men aboard the *Dragon* and sail her back alone! Might he, though, have plunged out of sheer despair and recklessness, knowing hope was past but willing to give his life in a last grim encounter?

Aye, that would be like him.

So Barny reached the end of the spit, facing the channel's mouth and the wide dark sea from which little breakers rolled in to chuckle on the sand. He stood with the water washing round his ankles, panting, trembling, straining his eyes into that fathomless void.

Not a wraith of a shape, out there; not a tremor of sound above the sly rustling tide. Gone! Gone without a word — into the night of twinkling stars, of soft caressing breezes — gone forever . . .

"Jem! Oh, Jemmy!" the boy called, his heart breaking.

And then came dreadful answer. Out of the sea a pillar of fire streamed to the top of heaven, and the world seemed to split wide apart with a stunning roar.

Barny was thrown to the sand. He cowered there, half blinded, his eardrums cracking under the impact of that monstrous detonation. He buried his face in his hands. All round him the water was alive with the plop and hiss of little falling things . . .

And now truly he must agree with Salter. He had gone mad. For in the flash that for a second had lit the darkness, his eyes had seen two great black ships, close inshore.

CHAPTER XXII

A RECKONING

At a sound Barny lifted his head. A round moon was creeping out of the sea. Directly in its path, something like a fish was thrashing slowly, steadily, toward shore.

The boy's heart leaped, and stood still. He was on his feet, shaking all over, staring. . . . Then he was in the water, plunging toward that strange moving thing. Then he had loosed a great cry, and reached the swimmer and was dragging him ashore.

"Jem! You old puncheon! Jem, how—"

"Whisht, Barrny, you here? Ah, wirra, lad—but I missed him! The villain was not aboarrd!"

"Missed who, you old barge?"

"Rackham, sure. Who else? Thinks I 'twuz him escapin'?"

"Jem, listen. I — got him."

"You!"

"Aye, Jem. He's fast in the cave."

Over the hunchback's features spread slowly a mighty grin. He threw his arms round Barny. "You! You!" Then the two of them commenced to chatter like magpies, both together.

"I swung the hilt on him, see, and — "

"Come to meself about sundown, fit as a fiddle save fur this bump on the pate. 'Tis mighty strange, thinks I, that all's so quiet — and then I sees the wreck av the stockade, and the brig and snow stove in, and — "

"Trussed him up with his own red cloak, Jem! I wish — "

"But if the ship's goin' to move, sez I, why Jemmy'll be movin' with her. You don't get clear that way, Calico Jack, sez I. And there wuz me grenado, divil a bit the worrse fur what we'd both been through. So I hops aboarrd, and there, if ye will believe it, wuz the treasure! And there right beneath ut in her magazine wuz the biggest store av ammunition ever I laid eye to. And no Rackham aboarrd, but Shattock and that Rowse and a score more heavin' away at the oars, a-towing her outside. Whisht, we must be doin' the best we can, sez I. And I lays a trail av

powder to that grenado layin' it in the middle of the magazine floor. And I — "

" But Rackham didn't know the loot was gone. They'd tricked him. That's why, in his bewilderment, I had the chance to — "

" Sure, they would! And after I'd leaped overboarrd, I swum under water fur fear I'd have me head blowed off. Man, what a bust when she went! "

So utterly engrossed had they been in this joyful gossip, 'twas not till now they remarked that Salter and a crowd of men, who had run down to the beach in amazement at the explosion, were milling about them. Voices rose to a clamor as Jem was recognized. Salter pushed his way through the throng.

But before he could speak, a new voice, sharp and stern, came in off the water.

" Ashore there! Lay down your arms or we'll blow you into kingdom come! "

Dead silence fell. The moonlight now showed plainly those two big ships, anchored close in, that Barny had thought phantoms of his mad grief. The hail had come from two longboats, black with men, lying just off the spit.

Salter laughed gruffly. " Arms? We have none to throw down, sir. Who be you, and what will ye have of us? "

" His Majesty's ship of the line, *Delicia,* Com-

modore Traherne commanding, and the frigate *Coq d'Or* of France, Captain Marron. Who blew up that vessel in the offing? We are in search of a man named Rackham, and another named André Paul Benoit, and we have reason to think they are here. Are they?"

After a blank pause, Salter spoke again, but with the laughter gone from his voice. "Aye. But the first is at large somewhere on the island, and the latter is sore hurt. Pull in, sir, and follow us."

In another moment the little strand was filled with tramping stalwarts. Led by Salter and the two naval officers, the whole body moved up the foreshore toward the lights of the council hall.

Barny clung close to Jem. He had no inkling of what this new turn of fate portended. But his heart was at peace; old Jem was alive beside him, and he didn't intend they two should be separated again.

As such of the company as could squeeze into the building passed over the threshold, a strange sight met their eyes. Captain Benoit, his head swathed in bandages and his left arm trussed in a sling, moved slowly among the wounded on the earth floor. He was pale and haggard, but a smile trembled on his fine features as he bent low to whisper encouragement and cheer to his men.

He looked up quickly at the crowd issuing in, and seeing those two with Salter he started and stared round him wildly.

Captain Marron gave him no time to escape, if such had been his intention; he stepped forward, an eager smile on his dark face, and bowing respectfully before Benoit, commenced to speak, fast and low, in his own tongue.

You may believe that Barny gaped at that. Wedged between Jem and a burly seaman off one of the warships, in his excitement he made bold to address the latter as to the meaning of this strange proceeding.

The fellow grunted. "A body'd think ye would know who he is: you're with him here, ain't ye? He's a noble lord, that's who. The Sieur de Benoit, Chevalier of the Order of Saint Michael — or so they say. Younger son of an ancient line — lost fur years and years. His gov'ment sent yonder nabob overseas a-searchin' fur him. They say he had a great name as a fighter, and the king o' the Frenchies hoped if found he might be the means o' restorin' the papal jewels — "

"Wh-what?"

"Papal jewels! Deaf, are ye? Or ain't ye heard what all the world's been a-talkin' of this year past?"

"Aye," quoth Barny hastily. "I — I've

heard." And he stood there aghast, wiggling his ears as a memory came racing back to him and his heart raced with it.

And then, at a word he had recognized in the talk still brisk between his captain and the tall officer, the lad had started forward out of the press by the door, to whisper in Benoit's ear.

Rackham! They wanted Rackham . . .

Captain André listened, and an incredulous smile quickened on his face. His good arm reached out and grasped Barny's shoulder.

" My son," he said, very low. " You have done well." Then turning abruptly, " Salter," he called, " take a couple of men with you at once to Cave Point. Bring in — what you find there."

" Aye, aye, sir."

When the men had gone, Barny again leaned toward his leader. " By your leave, Cap'n, I was right — about Jem."

" What mean you by that, Barny? "

" He's here, sir. Salter wouldn't believe me, but I saw him leap from the cliff to the *Dragon's* spar as she moved out. He — "

" Impossible! "

" Not a whit, sir! He blew her up and swam ashore. He's here to prove it." And Barnaby beckoned the hunchback forward.

" Jem! Jem, you reckless Irishman! Then that was what we took for a clap of thunder!

Jem, ye rascal, do ye know what you've sent to the bottom of the sea?"

Before the bashfully grinning hunchback could answer Benoit had turned upon Marron.

"*Monsieur le Capitaine,*" he said soberly, "I regret that 'twill be impossible for me to accept the king's commission. When first you spoke, sir, I thought the job easy — for as a fact I had come upon the precious objects you mentioned and was attempting to guard them against further sacrilege. But now — you heard the explosion? — it seems . . . Sir, I regret this exceedingly. But they are gone."

"What! Ah, Chevalier, but this is a loss irreparable. My Lord Regent felt that, with diplomatic affairs growing difficult at the Vatican, this *coup* would bring all clear. Ah, sir, I cannot tell you — "

"By your leave," cries Barny again, nigh bursting with his news. "If it is the pope's cross you speak of, 'tis safe in the bush down by the point. I dragged it there with my own hands a fortnight past, and marked the spot well, before ever all this trouble happened. By your leave, sir — "

"Barny!" gasped Benoit. "What is this ye say?"

As the boy was on the point of repeating his assertion, the crowd at the door parted, and Calico Jack Rackham, laughably embroiled and toiled

in his own proud red garment, stood before them.

Even so, his bearing was haughty and assured, and sparks of furious anger darted from his jet-black eyes.

"How now, sirrah!" he snarled. "What manner of —"

"John Rackham," said Benoit coolly and without raising his voice, "good evening! These gentlemen" — with inclined head he indicated Marron and Traherne — "these officers want you."

"For what?" Rackham barked.

"For piracy upon the high seas, Rackham."

"Ha! Loose my hands, ye pious rogue, and I'll show ye somewhat'll make ye talk out t'other side of your lying mouth!"

At Benoit's command it was done, and Rackham pulled a paper from his pocket.

"Read that!" he jeered, shaking the pardon in his captors' faces.

Sighing, Benoit passed the paper to Traherne. The British officer, a little ramrod of a man with a ruddy face and ice-blue eyes, glanced through the document and looked up with a grim smile.

"This pardon is dated the seventeenth, I see," he reflected. "And on the nineteenth, which was yesterday, Captain Marron and I picked up a boatload of Portuguese from a *guarda del costa* called the *Nostra Signiora.* You start, Rack-

ham? Aye, gentlemen, this craft and a sister patrol had been set upon in Exuma Sound by a brace of ships — let me see, the *Venture* brig and the *Flying Dragon.*" Suddenly his voice lashed out. "Rackham, were you in command of that marauding squadron?"

Rackham's face had gone gray. He said no word.

Traherne beckoned a petty officer from the door. "Take him down to the boats. Guard him on your life. The governor will never forgive us if we let him go now."

"A moment!" Captain Marron interposed courteously. "Am I mistaken? Did not Governor Rogers tell me that by your royal master's gracious words a reward was due any man who captured one of these pirate captains alive?"

"Aye, certes," Traherne agreed. "And many thanks, *mon capitaine,* for nudging my memory. Chevalier, who is responsible for the apprehension of this man?"

"Why, the lad here," says Benoit, beaming, and with his lean brown hand still clasping Barny's shoulder.

"Ha! Good, and by the look of him he deserves it." Commodore Traherne's eyes twinkled as he bent them on Barny's rags and his dishevelment. "Two hundred pounds in gold, my boy, as soon as we can count it out of the

Delicia's strong box. Governor Rogers will be pleased."

"And I," Marron announced, "intend to add a like sum if the boy's tale of the cross be true."

"True, sir!" young Barny flared up hotly. "And think you that I'd lie to you?"

"Nay, soft, soft, Barny," Benoit cautioned, smiling. "He does not know thee as I do. Come, where are thy manners, lad? Thank the gentlemen, to be sure!"

Covered with blushes, then, at his bold protest, Barny could but murmur his gratitude as the two officers burst out laughing and clapped him upon the back.

And now came an interruption in the form of a great shout of rage from Rackham, who had watched and heard all this with a black face. "Rewards!" the man bellowed, beside himself. "Rewards, and bowings and scrapings, and pretty words! Faugh! Ye crack-brained fools! 'Tis all a mess of lies. That man there" — he leveled a furious finger at Benoit — "is more pirate than I ever thought of being!"

"Eh? What's this?" said Traherne sharply.

Marron's honest face had clouded with indignation, but the British officer glanced from Rackham to Benoit, quickly suspicious. "I trust you can vouch for your countryman, Marron," he growled.

Before Marron could speak, Benoit lifted his hand. There was a sheaf of papers in it. "Nay," he said quietly, "but I will vouch for myself, Commodore. Here is my only proof of innocence, except that which may be furnished by the men about me. Prithee, read."

Traherne read, every word. When he was done, he handed back the articles to Benoit. "Chevalier," he said gruffly, "I salute you. You are a brave man, sir." And that subject was closed.

But Rackham's anger leaped out afresh. "That whelp!" he blazed. "There's a young pirate for you if ever there was one! Shipped aboard of me for three or four weeks, he did, and helped us — "

A man swathed in bandages rose up off the floor where he had been lying with other wounded, and limped forward. It was Cocklyn.

"Beggin' yer pardon, masters, but he lies in his teeth. I was one o' the crew of the *Fancy* brig out o' Boston when she was took by this big noise here. When he swung over her rail, by accident my piece went off and he paid me for that with a ball in my shoulder. I've been waitin' for him ever since.

"Now this boy was with us. And I stand here to prove that Calico Jack took him by force and wouldn't leave him choose. Grabbed him, he did,

and drawed his rapier that had just slain our captain, and yanked the lad aft where the body of old Bellamy laid. ' Let my tuck persuade thee! ' he yelled, and pulled the lad with him. If that's not takin' by force, what is? "

Heads nodded in agreement. Having said his say, Cocklyn took a pull at his forelock and stepped back among his mates.

Rackham screamed, " I tell ye — "

But a howl of derision from all present shoved that cry back between his teeth. Traherne snapped, " Take him along, quick, Bos'n. We've had enough of his yapping tongue." A heavy fist fell on Rackham's shoulder, a voice growled disgustedly in his ear, " Aw, stow that! " And between two seamen, snarling and struggling, the man was hustled out of the hall and away.

Barnaby, meantime, was pulling Jem aside. He had had quite enough of all this notoriety; what he wanted was to get off somewhere and rest, and eat, and talk.

As the two set off for the cookhouse, " Jem," says the lad chuckling gayly, " I'll tell you a secret. I'm the King of Spain! "

" Whisht, sur, and I'll go ye wan better. I'm Jem O'Neil, begorry! "

Barny wiggled his ears. " Lumme, I suspicioned it all along, ye rascal! "

CHAPTER XXIII

BUCCANEERS INTO BARRELS

Two days later came the rains.

In the steady, sluicing downpour the island looked draggled and forlorn. High tides and seepage filled the cave with water. In the lagoon, the gaunt bow of the *Fancy* brig pointed like an accusing finger at the leaden sky. The snow lay upon her beam ends amongst the rubbish of the wharfs. As in grim mockery, the cliff across the channel now guarded a stockade that gaped and sagged, and buildings that freely let rain through their broken roofs on to muddy floors. A row of crosses stood fixed in the earth behind the council hall. The flagstaff was bare.

Not a living man was left on the island.

The *Delicia* had sailed for New Providence to

see justice done. Besides Rackham she bore Rowse and Gabe Shattock, and as many others of the crew of the *Dragon's* longboat as remained alive when, after the explosion of the ship's crammed magazine, the ghastly wreck of that boat that had towed her outside, drifted ashore. A score of raffish rogues in all — enough to content Governor Rogers, who would not be so generous with pardons this time. And what they said to each other during the passage to Providence would make a curious record.

The *Coq d'Or* was meanwhile footing north for Boston Town, where she would debark such of the Sieur de Benoit's band as chose to leave him, proceeding thence to France. Marron had dispatched a letter to Governor Rogers by the British warship, explaining his failure to return. In his own cabin the papal jewels lay safe under heavy guard. And he had persuaded his distinguished passenger to return home and join the naval service of his king.

Benoit kept to his room. His hurt at the perfidious hands of Calico Jack had proved more serious than the padre had at first expected. On deck above his cabin, men walked a-tiptoe; for several days there was doubt of his life. When at length the fever departed, he called for Jem and Barnaby.

Summoned by the little monk, those two has-

tened aft. On the way they were met by Carpenter Neal, who had of late spent much time hobnobbing with the frigate's " Chips."

" Is this yours, Barny? " the honest fellow inquired with a bashful grin, and extended a patched and new-varnished fiddle.

Jem shouted. Barny goggled at the instrument as if he had suddenly been struck blind.

" Good lack, Chips! Did you make it? "

" Nay, boy." Neal laughed at his bewilderment. " Jim Neal be smart, but no that smart. Look 'ee. When the snow pulled in and we set about overhaulin' her, I happed on this thing layin' in her poop scuppers under a coil of hawser. I'd seen ye with it and knowed 'twas yours. So I jest tucked it away in my ditty-box 'gainst the day when I'd have a chance for to shine it up for ye. There's a Frenchy here gave me the new strings, 'Twa'n't no work. Come, try it. See if it ain't good as new."

" Why, Chips, I take that mighty kind of you." Hastily Barny tuned up the instrument and jigged a bar or two. " Thank 'ee, Chips, thank 'ee. How does she sound, eh? Ah, but my fingers have lost the knack. Look. I'll meet you presently and play all I can remember for you."

Leaving the carpenter wreathed in smiles, Barny hurried after Jem and the padre.

At sight of his visitors the sick man's eyes

lighted, and he raised his strong hand, now pitifully thin and white, in greeting.

"*Mes enfants,*" he said huskily. "I have you both to thank" — and could get no further.

They sat by his bed place, awkward and flushed in the presence of this great lord whom they had regarded as one of them. 'Twas indeed the invalid who first recovered his composure.

"Ah, Jem, how I maligned thee! Yet what a waste, thou mad Celt — all that wealth —"

"Whisht, sur," the hunchback, no whit dismayed, caught him up briskly, "and ain't it far better layin' peaceful at bottom av the sea than a-settin' men at each others' throats the while?"

That bluff candor set them all at ease. "Aye, maybe. True for you, old stout heart." Benoit turned to Barnaby. "And but for thee, Barny lad, I'd be laid away behind the council hall with the rest."

Now was Barnaby loth to let all that begin again. His embarassed eye catching sight of the ebony cane in the corner, he picked it up and fumbled it between his fingers. "'Twas nothing, Cap'n," he muttered; and then abruptly, "Sir, would you tell me what means this device on the head of your stick?"

Benoit glanced at the chased silver knob, and his eyes grew reflective. "That? 'Tis an heraldic emblem, Barny, the crest of the house of

Benoit for many gallant years. That flower is the *fleur-de-lys* of France — you've seen it on the frigate's ensign?"

"Aye, sir. But the writing on the scroll beneath?"

"Ah, that's our motto. *En garde.* 'Tis what a man at fence cries to his adversary as he draws. Be ready — be prepared."

And of a sudden the man was laughing!

"How the good God must smile at us poor mortals, Barny. Here was I, setting up my little government so solemnly, stalking about the world with that proud legend in my hand; and there was I, caught unready and unprepared at every turn that counted!"

Jem grunted fiercely. Barnaby protested. "Faith, you do yourself injustice, sir!"

"Nay, lads," says the tall kindly man, his eyes fallen sober again. "Nay, 'tis you both I do injustice. For a man's readiness may be judged by the comrades about him. And in very truth, I chose my comrades well. In that, I defy any man to say I was not prepared."

For a space the room was quiet.

"And I will not admit," Benoit continued in a low voice, as if some one had asked him a question, "that in setting up that Free State I was in the wrong. Some day, I think, the nations will see that to be happy all men must be free. Open

councils, free speech, and a vote for all — that is to live," he mused, little guessing how soon the American colonies, then his own France, and at length Jem's Ireland were to put that noble aspiration to the test. " Some day," he whispered, lost in dreams.

" But how now!" He started up, and the smile his men loved spread over his handsome features. " Here is no way to treat visitors! What's that beneath thy coat, Barny? Not — but it is! Ha!"

"The carpenter found it and patched it up, sir. 'Tis as good as new." And proudly Barnaby showed the instrument, twigging its strings.

" Well, well! Good Neal, i' faith! And thy pipe, Jem? Come now — No, no, padre, I'm stronger every minute. Come on, men, give us a tune!"

Barny looked at Jem, and Jem looked at Barny. Both grinned amain. Jem drew forth his pipe and breathed warm upon its stops. Barny tuned the fiddle and lifted his bow.

" What'll it be, Jemmy?"

" Whisht! 'There Was a Doughty General' . . ."

The Sieur de Benoit, Chevalier of the Order of Saint Michael, beat time on his blankets as they played.

At Scarlett's Wharf in Boston Town, farewells were said and Jem and Barny stepped ashore.

Nicholas Hornigold had been dead these two months. Nobody knew what killed him. Simply, the morning after the *Fancy* brig had sailed on her last voyage, he had come down to his countinghouse as usual, and been found by an apprentice lying on the floor of his inner office, a strange strangled look on his dead face, and the lid of the chest left open. The authorities had examined the room below the chest, but its bare walls had told them nothing. 'Twas said that the merchant died of a heart complaint; and so far as Barny was concerned, that verdict remained the truth.

David Fenn had disappeared. Nobody knew where he had gone, and nobody missed him.

These matters but sobered Barny for the moment. His heart was flooding with a great joy.

Old Jem, fact was, had had enough of the sea, and was more than willing to try his luck ashore. There was the first source of Barny's happiness. For the lad had come home possessed of greater wealth than he had ever dreamed of. Four hundred pounds in gold! And something in his blue eyes hinted that he had a plan.

"And what'll ye be after doin' with all that stuff, Barrny?" Jem had asked him, as the *Coq d'Or* sailed slowly up the harbor.

"Jem, old gudgeon," says Barny, "I made up

my mind as to that the very night they gave it me. Look you. I'm minded to set myself up in the cooperage business. Buy out my father, and — "

" The cooperage — ! "

" Aye, old noggin! And what's more, I want a partner."

" Whisht! What sorrt av partner now, ye wild gossoon? "

" What sort of partner? " Barny's blue eyes grew misty as he looked hard at the bowed figure before him. " Why, you scatter-brained old son of a caved-in gogget, a partner I can build my barrels right round and fit 'em to! "

And his arm went over the hunched back.

But Barnaby Vane had more than a partner and much gold as he stepped again on his native shore and greeted his amazed and delighted parents and all the friends of former days. He had two words that were to cling forever in his memory.

En garde!

He could never think of them without a quickening of the heart, and a bright picture of that tall and gravely smiling leader who had forsworn his noble heritage in order to live among common men.

And it was those words, not his pounds and *louis d'or,* that in future years the lad was whim-

sically wont to call his Caribbee plunder. "Aye," he would smile, standing in the sunny door of his cooperage and listening to Jem's tapping hammer within — "aye, 'tis my own salvaged share of that mammoth loot of the ship *Flying Dragon.*"

And he would wiggle his ears.